

A School Like Whitmore: Second Year by Lonelyballoon

Series: [A School Like Whitmore](#) [2]

Category: IT (2017), IT - Stephen King

Genre: Ben needs love and appreciation, Boarding School AU, Co Written, F/F, F/M, Losers Club (IT) Friendship, M/M, Mike is actually part of the Losers Club?!?, Mike is also very relevant, No Way, Slow Burn, There's a big storyline, They all deserve better, because they're all naive, eddie is gay, it is a slow burn for a few ships, it's very gay but that's normal for a IT fic, neglect (mentioned), potentially minor homophobic slurs, richie is bi, shocking ik, wow i love my children

Language: English

Characters: Audra Phillips, Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Greta Bowie, Henry Bowers, Mike Hanlon, Original Characters, Patty Blum, Richie Tozier, Stan Uris

Relationships: Ben Hanscom/Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough/Beverly Marsh, Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier, Mike Hanlon/ Stan Uris (slow burn), Original Female Character/ Original Female character

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Summary:

It's been the summer, and now Bill, Ben, Eddie, Mike, Beverly, Richie and Stan are back at Whitmore Towers, their boarding school near the sea. But within old faces coming back and new ones appearing, the Losers are out of their depth. And someone is scheming to drown them, once and for all.

1. Act One, Scene One: Curtains Up

Author's Note:

!Discalmers and summary god first AU in comments!

1. “A school like Whitmore” is a series that follows that Losers through their five years at Whitmore. This is their second year so this is the second book BUT you don’t need to have read the first au to understand this. (Summary for first AU in comments)

2. The fics all have new storylines but the dynamics between characters are the same i.e Bill and Bev started dating in the first au and so are still dating in this au etc (there will be a first year summary in the comments)

3. The relationships tagged will all happen in this book APART FROM Mike and Stan, they happen in the third year. HOWEVER, they do interact romantically etc

4. I’ll tag anything else that needs to be tagged later, but if you’re concerned about something then please comment!

- Alice and Emma

Stan Uris, at the train station

“Bye mum! Bye dad!” Stan Uris hopped out of his dad’s rusted brown Toyota Corolla, collecting his larger than life suitcase and slightly too energetically slammed the car door shut. He watched as his parents pulled away down the track and sighed.

He was back. Back at the train station where it all started. Mountains of students were collectively bustling around with luggage flying behind them every which way and teachers were trying and failing to keep some sort of orderly-fashioned line of kids in order to get on the train. Stan looked down to his own suitcase and folded his fingers around the handle. It was time to get lost in the abyss of which was the train station.

Winding his way through, Stan bumped into someone who was

probably at least half his height. He quickly turned around to see who was currently struggling to their feet and found a small boy with the largest puppy dog eyes of fear he'd ever seen. Must be a first former, Stan thought.

"You alright?" He asked begrudgingly, itching to just find at the very least one of the Losers.

The boy nodded vigorously and sped off, supposedly to his assigned carriage. Stan checked his watch at the thought, he had fifteen minutes.

Stan, dodging yet another clutter of first formers screaming, (god was he like that?) made his way to the cafe. He vaguely remembered getting a coffee of some sort and walking straight back out. Little did he know, the boy he saw sitting alone in there was Ben Hanscom.

He pushed open the cafe door into the little retro room and looked around. Just as he remembered it. It was small but cosy, not particularly claustrophobic, with a small turn table that wasn't too dissimilar to the one in his first form common room. Stan smiled to himself as he remembered the countless times it either didn't work or someone would break their fingers trying to carry it. Maybe they'd have a turn table in their new common room? Maybe the layout would be exactly the same and the fireplace would be at the left of the room as ever.

Stan took a last scan of the room, walking slowly backwards, when something caught his eye.

Fiery red hair hung loosely down by the girl's neck, just reaching her shoulder blades. She laughed easily as the firecracker tucked her copper hair behind her ears, better known as Beverly Marsh.

Next to her stood none other than the smart, kind architect of their year. Ben Hanscom stood happily by the counter chatting away to Bev before quickly spotting Stan and aggressively called him over.

"Oh my GOD! Stan!" Bev squealed as she ran across the room to engulf Stan with a hug. Stan smiled as he attempted to match how hard Bev was squeezing his lungs.

“Hey Bev.” Stan beamed as they broke apart, swatting Bev’s hands away from his hair.

“Stanley Uris.” Ben hugged Stan gently and laughed.

“Ben Hanscom.” Stan chuckled in return as they, too, broke away.

“Your hair! It’s, it’s so long!” Bev held Stan’s hair in her hands gently, barely restraining herself from jumping up and down on the spot.

“Know what else is long?” A familiar tone came barricading into the cafe.

“Richie Trashmouth Tozier, the one and only.” Stan deadpanned before turning around to see the lanky boy, grinning widely.

“Richiee!” Bev reached up on her tip toes to give Richie a hug.

“My God you’ve grown tall.” Ben shook his head in disbelief, walking up to Richie for him to barely come to his neck.

“Huh, that explains why the first formers look like absolute midgets.” Richie shrugged as he leant his elbow on Ben’s shoulder.

“I knocked into one by accident this morning and I think he genuinely thought I was a goblin with mushrooms growing out of my ears.” Stan huffed a laugh.

“Nah I think it was your hair that did it for them.” Richie grinned mischievously, getting a big fat eye roll of Stan. Richie turned to look at Bev. “Speaking of hair, Bill is gonna love running his hands through your hair when you’re-“

“Shut the fuck up Richard.” Bev pushed Richie playfully.

This. This is what Stan hadn’t realised he’d missed so much. The constant teasing that could go back and forth and back and forth until god knows how long for.

Stan leant on the counter and smiled. Not long before he’d be back at Whitmore, and it felt like time couldn’t run any slower.

Ben Hansom, at the café at the station

“Think we can take food for the train?” Richie asked, eyeing the selection of flapjacks, brownies and cakes on the counter.

“They have a cafe on the train.” Stan pointed out.

“Yeah but that food sucks ass.” Richie pouted, turning to face the rest of the losers.

“You sound like Eddie.” Bev nudged him playfully.

“Speaking of Eddie.” Ben said, glancing around. “Where is he? And Mike and Bill?”

The train was due to leave in five minutes and so far, Ben had only reunited with Bev, Stan and Richie. But despite it only being three of the losers, he already felt completed. Summer was great, him and his Mum going on day trips and baking in their small kitchen but apart of Ben felt empty. Like he’d left something behind, some of his heart at Whitmore.

He tried his best not to brood over his school over the holidays and he mostly succeeded, being too busy to reminisce, but he did find himself thinking wishfully of their trips to town and art lessons and nights up North Tower occasionally. Mostly when his Mum had to rush to fill the odd shift and he was left on his own. It sort of reminded him of his life before Whitmore. Before he had friends.

And he never wanted to go back to that. Before Whitmore, before the start of his actual life, he’d been very lonely. And the thing is, Ben had never realised it. He had been perfectly content with himself and just him for company. But now he’d spent a year with the Losers, it seemed crazy to think he once had no one.

And now it was September 6th. Which meant living with the most important people of his life again.

He could scream with joy.

“What do you think would happen if they missed the train?” Bev

asked as the four of them headed out of the cafe.

"They'd have to run after it." Richie said seriously. "And hope no other trains came behind them."

"Beep beep." Ben said casually.

"Breaking news, breaking news, we officially have our first beep of our second year, why I do believe." Richie said in his news reporter voice, pretending to adjust his glasses.

"Yeah and they'll soon be a second." Stan said, pushing the door open. "They'd probably have to wait for the other train." He said then, addressing Bev.

"When would that come?" Ben asked as he stepped out from the cafe.

"Dunno." Stan said.

The platform was even busier than it was when they had entered the cafe. Students in Whitemore uniform were running around, yelling to one another, people were hugging parents and wishing them goodbye and teachers made desperate attempts to get everyone under control. The train that would carry Ben to school was already at the station. It looked impressively big, puffing away grey smoke. Ben was hit with déjà-vu, knowing exactly a year ago he was boarding this exact train for the first time. It seemed like a lifetime ago, and now him and the Losers were back for their second year.

"Look at the first years!" Bev gasped, pointing at a babble of very lost looking children. "Gosh, don't they look young!"

"Babies." Stan scoff. "Now we're not the youngest."

"No way were we that small." Ben muttered, looking at the new students. They all looked tiny, looking around the platform with big eyes.

"Nah man, I accidentally put my old school shirt on this morning." Richie said, shaking his head. "It didn't even fit!"

"We've all changed." Bev said, a distant look in her eyes. "For the

better, I think.”

Ben took a step to the side and surveyed his friends. Bev was right, as she always was; they had changed. Bev’s once short hair had now grown so it almost reached her chin. It was wavy in a way Ben thought only Bev could achieve. Her freckles had become more dark but her green eyes still had the same twinkle they did when he last said goodbye to her.

Richie had become even more lanky. If Ben was to find a metaphor for him, he’d probably pick a noodle to best describe Richie’s arms and legs. But it didn’t look bad on him. Actually, Ben had to admit that the summer had made Richie’s cheekbones even more prominent than ever. And he had a jawline that Ben envied. But he still wore his same coke bottle glasses and his once wild hair was now a jungle.

Stan still looked neat and proper, and he looked almost exactly the same apart from the few center meters he’d grown. But the main difference was his hair. Last year, it had been curly and didn’t go further than his ears. But now it was almost as long as Bev’s, and the curls looked like they were fading into waves. But Ben thought it still looked neat, still looked Stan.

He didn’t think he’d changed much over the summer. He’d grown a bit and his Mum had made him go to the hairdresser half way through the holiday but apart from that, Ben still felt the same. Actually, looking at how his friends had changed, Ben felt a little... plain. Like they were all growing up and trying new things and he was still just Ben.

He pushed that thought back. He couldn’t start overthinking, not when he hadn’t even arrived at Whitemore yet.

“Eddie’s had a growth spurt.” Bev said, as if she could read Ben’s mind.

“He’s had a what?” Richie said, looking at Bev completely stunned.

“You two met over the summer?” Stan asked, ignoring Richie’s obvious distress as he came to terms with what Bev said.

“Yeah.” Bev said, and she smiled one her her glowing smiles, one that Ben thinks burns from the sun itself. “We met a few times, biking down to the barrens. He was the only thing that kept me from running away.”

Ben decides at that moment that Beverly Marsh deserves every single bit of love and happiness the world has to offer. They all know how shitty her parents are and how her dad use to abuse her. Ben really didn't want her to go home for the summer, and he knew all the Losers felt the same. Stan even offered to let Bev stay at his house all summer but Bev declined, saying she'd be alright. And she did seem truly okay. But Ben knew Bev Marsh and Ben knew how she thought lowly of her problems. As soon as they settled down, he planned to make sure she was actually okay.

But right now, they had to focus on actually getting to school.

“Come on.” Ben said, glancing down at his watch. “Let's board before the train actually leaves.”

The four losers head for the second year carriage this time, instead of the first. Mr Johnston, their new tutor, was standing at the carriage door, letting students in.

“Look, Emily cut her hair!” Bev said as Emily Levin, a girl from East Tower, ducked into the train, her once long dark hair now much shorter.

“We have a lot of people to catch up with.” Stan said.

“I wonder if Luke the hog's head has gotten any bigger.” Richie said with fake concern. Luke, or better know between the losers as little asshole, was someone who had outed Eddie last year. Thankfully, the teachers had handled it well, and Eddie hadn't gotten any shit from it. But that didn't leave Luke off the hook, especially after he tried to pin the blame on Richie, and the Losers still frequently fantasies about pushing him off a cliff.

“Hello, Good day.” Mr Johnston said, smiling as they stepped on. “Names, please?”

“Stan Uris, Beverly Marsh, Richie Tozier and Ben Hansom.” Stan said, and their new tutor ticked them off on his check sheet.

“Now, please find a compartment and keep check on your luggage.” He said after jotting their names down. Mr Johnston looked friendly and kind but Ben thought he wouldn’t hesitate to yell if order was required.

Ben thanked him and the four walked down the Second Year carriage, trying to find an empty one.

“Hey Buffy, had a good hols?”

“Eric, you idiot, come sit with us!”

“Say, Audra, you look tanned!”

“Blake, move your big legs!”

“Hey Greta, stop moaning for one second and come help!”

As they walked, Ben heard familiar voices everywhere. He let himself smile; it all felt so perfectly right.

“Mike, Eddie!”

Ben’s head snapped around and he saw Stan sliding open a compartment door.

Sure enough, Eddie Kaspbrak and Mike Hanlon were already sitting there, grinning away as him and the other Losers climbed in.

“Hey Stan, Hey Bev, Hey Ben, Hey Rich, how was your summer, was it good, did you meet at all and did you write because if you wrote I didn’t get it because my mother stopped me from receiving any letters so I’m really sorry about that but I saw Bev and we-“

Eddie talked at a hundred miles an hour as the four pushed their bags onto the rack. Bev was right; Eddie did look taller, although Ben thought he was still the shortest out of all of them. His cheekbones also looked more prominent.

Mike looked a lot taller too, and his shoulders seemed broader. That made sense though. Mike lived on a farm and Ben supposed he did a lot of heavy work over the holiday.

“Have you guys met Mr Johnston?” Mike said, moving up to let Stan sit next to him.

“Just did.” Stan said, squishing by the window and Eddie moved sides to sit next to Richie. “He seems nice enough.”

“Think we’ll have more sleepovers this year?” Bev asked, sitting next to Eddie.

“Hope so.” Mike said.

“Except lets not get caught this time.” Ben joked, taking a seat next to Mike.

“You’re lucky you have me.” Richie said. “I’m a master at being silent.”

“You?” Stan asked, raising his eyebrows.

“Don’t look so surprised Stanny boy.” Richie said. “I’m as silent as a mouse when me and Eddie’s Mum are-“

“Beep-fucking-beep!” Eddie said, slapping Richie’s arm.

“Oh you wound me, Spaghetti!” Richie said, fake swooning into the window.

“What have I said about calling me spaghetti.” Eddie huffed.

“But It’s so cute, Eds.” Richie said, moving to pinch Eddie’s cheek.

“I will personally throw you out of this window.” Eddie said, and Ben laughed. He really had missed this.

The train whistle blew and the train doors began to shut.

“Guys, where’s Bill?” Bev said, leaving forward worriedly.

Ben glanced out the window. It was strange that Bill wasn’t here

already. In fact, Ben hadn't seen a glimpse of him anywhere that day.

"You think he's in a different compartment?" Eddie asked nervously.

"Doubt it." Stan said.

"Maybe he's just gone to the cafe." Mike said.

"Maybe-" Ben started, but Bev let out a squeak and pointed out of the window.

Running up to the train, a mere few seconds before it pulled away, was none other than Bill Denbrough.

Richie Tozier, on the train heading for Whitmore

Richie had really never been one for long journeys. He was restless enough as it was, and being cooped up in a car for hours on end made him want to scream his lungs out. But the train had been moving for at least three hours now and not only were Richie's lungs still inside his body but he was having more fun than he had over the summer.

The Losers had all raided the train's cafe half an hour ago and now they were blowing sugar wrappers across their compartment to see who's reached the furthest. Stan was the long running champion, whereas Bev kept shooting hers off at the losers' heads. With anyone else, it would be duller than dull, but the losers somehow made it a theme park attraction.

And as he watched white paper zoom across the compartment, he realised you never really miss something until you can't have it.

"They should make this into a sport." Eddie said as his paper flew across the room, just missing Mike's head.

"Yeah, then Stan could put this and swimming onto his list of talents." Ben giggled.

"Which reminds me, are you going to swim again this year?" Mike asked, shifting to face Stan.

“Planning on it.” Stan said, smiling. “I really want to try out of the national race this year.”

“Oh wow, no need to flash all your achievements at us.” Richie said, shaking his head. “Very rude, very rude.”

“You could enter a sport for the amount of dick jokes made in a minute.” Eddie said.

Richie and Bev looked up at each other at the same time, their eyes bright as Eddie said: “Guys, no, I was joking!”

“We could all try joining something together.” Ben said. “Whitemore has a never ending list of clubs.”

“Let’s do lap-dancing.” Richie said, leaning forward.

“Or trapeze.” Bev suggested.

“Bill said skydiving, didn’t you?” Mike joked, nudging Bill gently.

“Huh?” Bill said, looking around.

“We were talking about sports.” Eddie said timidly and wow, Richie could practically feel the nervous energy radiating off him.

“O-o-oh.” Bill said, his eyes missing their usual shine. “C-c-cool.”

The compartment fell silent for a while and Richie knew they were all thinking about the same thing: Bill Denbrough.

When he’d climbed onto the train a mere ten seconds before it set off, Richie guessed he’d just slept in. After all it was Bill. But it was quickly apparent that something was wrong.

He came into their compartment as the train was fully leaving the station and instead of a shit-eating grin to match the other six losers, he looked completely exhausted and upset.

“Bill, we were worried you wouldn’t make it!” Ben had said, patting the space next to him.

“S-s-s-s-sorry.” Bill said.

And okay, maybe it was because Richie hadn’t seen Bill in six weeks and his brain had a tendency to forget details but Bill’s stutter definitely sounded worse.

“How was your summer.” Bev asked gently, shuffling up to make room for Bill.

Bill, however, just shrugged and sat between Ben and Mike, not even realising that Bev had made room for him.

“Bet you’re real sad to go back to this hell hole.” Richie had said, trying to lighten the mood. “You’re going to miss home, old boy.”

“N-no.” Bill said and Richie flinched. His voice was lacking all happiness and joke that was normally a custom with Bill’s voice. Instead, it sounded harsh and cold.

The six had shared an uneasy look and let it drop. But even when they’d taken up to racing down the train, Bill still looked distant. He’d taken on to cheering Ben and Bev but Richie Tozier knew Bill Denbrough better than anyone else in the world and he knew that Bill’s smiles were forced.

The only question was why.

“Eddie, Bev, how did you meet without your parents knowing?” Ben said suddenly, trying to change the subject.

“With great difficulty.” Eddie joked, looking over at Ben. “My mum locked me in my room for the first week back. Said it was because she couldn’t trust me after I ran away from her. The only time I was allowed out was for toilet breaks.”

“She didn’t.” Mike said, looking totally aghast.

“She did.” Eddie said solemnly. “She even opened the door to pass me food, just so I couldn’t eat at the dining table.”

Richie felt lava boil through his vines. Fucking Sonia Kaspbrak. Couldn’t she do everyone a favour and have a heart attack? Eddie

was such a strong, independent person and his mother was too scared to understand that Eddie didn't need her. So she made him believe he was sick. The only sick person, Richie knew, was Eddie's Mother. But locking Eddie in a room for a whole week didn't stop Eddie from coming back, and Richie felt a flash of pride at this.

"I had to climb out my window," Eddie continued. "Then I'd cycle around Derry, to clear my head if anything."

“He came over to my apartment without realising it.” Bev said. “I was sitting on the backstairs to smoke and I saw him biking past. I called out his name and he waited while I got my bike and then we went down to the barrens.”

“Barrens?” Stan asked.

"It's quiet down there," Bev said lowly. "No one to bother us."

“We tried to go at least once a week.” Eddie said, his voice lighting the very compartment. “And we didn’t run into Henry Bowers and his assholes once!”

"I'm happy for your." The Ben said.

Eddie and Bev smiled and Richie knew if he didn't crack a joke in a moment in the next second he'd melt into goo.

“Well I don’t know about you fuckers but your mothers certainly enjoyed the holiday.” He said loudly, taking comfort in yet another joke.

“Oh wow, I cant believe it but I’ve missed your sex jokes.” Mike said, shaking his head.

Eddie scoffed and Richie elbowed him. “What, did you not miss my charm too, Eds?”

“What charm?” Eddie said, turning to face him. “And don’t call me Eds, Rich.”

“You know you love it.” Richie said, ruffling Eddie’s hair. “Eds, Eds, Eds, Eds, Ed-“

"Anyway what did you all do over summer." Ben said quickly, putting a stop to Richie.

"Mike was good." Stan offered, leaning forward. "We went to the beach for a week. And me and my Dad went bird watching quite a lot."

"Can you do that at Whitemore?" Eddie asked.

"I could try." Stan said. "I brought my binoculars and bird book. North Tower would be a good spot, too."

He concluded with a smile then looked pointedly at his Mike.

"Mine was amazing." Mike said, beaming. "Me and Dad got the tractor out and I got to spend all day with the animals. And it made me realise how pure they are and how they deserve better yanno, and how all they really want is unconditional love and they never hurt anyone and they're so loyal and--"

"And your point?" Richie said, putting a stop to Mike's ramblings.

"I'm vegan." Mike said, sitting back.

Richie blinked.

"Oh." Bev said. "That's... nice."

"Good for you." Ben said, leaning over Bill to shake Mike's shoulder. "Go animals!"

"Won't that be hard, with our canteen food?" Eddie said.

"I thought that." Mike nodded. "But then I was like, what if it was Delilah man? She wouldn't of wanted this."

Delilah was Mike's sheep and Richie was truly starting to believe that Mike would marry her before anyone else.

"You're right." Bev said. "Animals deserve better. So much better. You know, there was once this duck that lived near my apartment--"

“And Ben, how was your summer?” Richie said quickly, not wanting to hear about the adventures of a stray duck.

“It was good.” Ben said. “Me and my Mum mostly stayed at home but we had some days out. Bill, what about you?”

“Oh-oh-oh-oka-y.” Bill said, not looking up. He looked like a shadow of his old self, sitting in the compartment. His eyes weren’t bright and without his laugh, Richie thought the train had lost colour.

“Richie, what was your summer like?” Bev asked, leaning around Eddie to see him.

“Oh, fine.” Richie said, being all too reminded of the summer. “Me and my family went on holiday to Greece, that was pretty ace. And uh, I met some people.”

“Some people?” Stan asked. “That’s very cryptic.”

Richie laughed and hoped it covered up the shakiness in his voice. Because he had met some people. One person in particular. And maybe he was being over dramatic but Richie didn’t want anyone to know about to boy he’d hung out with over summer.

Especially Eddie.

Beverly Marsh, on the train, about to arrive at Whitemore

Beverly couldn’t believe how six weeks could have gone so quickly. Of course at the her home it felt like time was being dragged through a race course by a snail, but this morning was so much of a flurry of trying to get her last un-ironed school shirts packed that she forgot to give her dad even a look that said goodbye before running to the bus stop.

She knew that she wouldn’t be able to get the bus with Eddie. Bev knew all too well that his mother wouldn’t let him go anywhere near public transport let alone a train station. It did cross her mind whether Eddie would actually be able to come.

But he did. Eddie was one of, if not the most bravest person Bev had ever met. Height aside, she looked up to Eddie. Bev looked up to all of them.

Beverly Marsh was her own person, but she's learnt that to be her own person, she needs the Losers with her. If she'd never met them, she probably wouldn't have returned to Whitemore if she was completely honest.

But Beverly was glad she did. Just looking around the carriage to see all of them either chatting happily or looking out of the window day-dreamily made her smile non-intentionally. However when she looked over to Bill, he looked different. Out of sorts you could say. His eyes lacked it's usual excited sparkle and even his hair looked less lively, if that was a thing.

Bev sighed. Whatever it was, she'd make sure Bill would be alright. Besides, they were going to-

"WHITEMORE! Look! Over the hill guys look!" Mike suddenly shouted. The six pressed up to the window eagerly, Richie even pressing his nose directly onto the window until he looked like a pig with oversized glasses.

"Richie that's disgusting." Stan shook his head. "Bill wanna come see?"

"I c-c-cuh-can s-s-s-s-see." Bill nodded

There it was. Standing in all it's glory with the sun rising just as they'd left it a few weeks ago. Bev could just see the glimmering swimming pool which shimmered the ripples onto Whitemore's side. Excitement rushed through Beverly's veins as if a dam had broken and water crashed through.

"Guys! We're almost back, we're almost at Whitemore!" Bev squealed, having to refrain herself from yelling, 'we're almost home!'

The train pulled to a stop, still as screeching as last time, and they all reached up to the luggage rack to get their suitcases.

"Bev make sure you don't forget your bags this time." Mike chuckled

as he pointedly handed Bev her suitcase.

They lined up along the carriage hallway, exciting chatter and all.

“Has everybody, and I mean every single human species on this train, got their belongings? Because if you don’t I suggest getting it now before you’re completely and utterly screwed.” Mr Johnston called, beginning to usher the students out of the train.

“Forgot how big it is.” Eddie said in wonder as they made their way up to the great Whitemore gate.

“What your mum says every night.” Richie sighed dreamily, carrying his suitcase on top of his head.

“Rich you’re gonna break your neck like that.” Mike snorted.

“We can only hope.” Stan said flatly. They all stopped to look at him and Stan quickly put his hand up in defence. “Guys I’m kidding. You should get my humour by now.”

“Almost felt the need to Beep beep you Stanny.” Richie shook his head wistfully, throwing his arm around Stan’s shoulder as they continued to walk again.

“Richard Tozier you are on thin ice-“ Stan swung Richie’s arm off him with force, causing Bev to come between them.

“Now now Boys, don’t want any broken bones before we even get through Whitemore’s gate now do we.” She said, barely containing her laughter through her voice.

The students of second formers made their way into the canteen. Bev beamed as she remembered all the sights and smells and memories of the canteen she hadn’t even realised she missed.

“Welcome back all, I hope you all had great summer holidays and your brains are back and ready for more learning.” Mrs Wilson greeted, smiling with her arms outstretched. “First formers are just seeing Matron so if you second formers all go to your dorms and unpack that would be great. Don’t forget to bring your medical certificates to Matron once you see her in about twenty minutes.”

“Medical certificates? That’s a new one.” Eddie said as they made their way to their new dorms.

“Because of the fire, my guess is, remember?” Mike said grimly.

“God how did I forget.” Richie shook his head as if shaking off a bad dream.

“I swear this is more stairs than last year.” Bev puffed as they continued to walk up the second flight of stairs.

“W-W-W-Wait,” Bill stopped, gently startling them all.

“You ok Bill?” Ben asked.

“H-h-huh-h-How do w-w-we give m-m-m-mmm-m-“

“Medical certificates?” Stan finished his sentence for him. “I um, I’m not sure. We weren’t told to print anything off so I guess we could just write down allergies and all that.” Thy continued to walk upwards.

“This is where we part, fair lady.” Richie reinforced one of his British accents as they got to the different stairways leading to east tower and north tower.

“Rich are you even trying to do a British accent?” Eddie’s voice echoed as Bev watched the boys trudge up to their dorm.

As soon as Chloe opened the door to east, memories flooded back into Bev’s mind immediately. The walls were a different colour completely, and the carpet, but the beds were more or less in the same place, same coloured folding screen in the corner of the room as last year. Just looking at the folding screen made Beverly instantly smile, remembering the fashion show Eddie and Mike had put on last year.

“Ooh look at the bathroom! They have new shower curtains! Patty what material do you think these are made out?” Audra chimed as they ventured into the bathroom.

“Since when was patty a clothes expert?” Greta scoffed, rolling her

eyes. Bev sighed, forgetting about the pain of which was Greta Bowie.

“Since this summer,” Patty answered cheerfully. “My mum took me to a fashion work shop and loved it ever since.”

“Didn’t need a whole back story.” Greta muttered under her breath, throwing her bright pink suitcase on her bed.

Emily opened her suitcase slightly and fished out her little note book, tearing out a sheet for them all.

“What if you have no allergies?” Buffy asked, doodling on the corners of the paper.

“Just put you can have any medicines if need be. Then a little dash like;” Bev drew a non-existent straight line in the air. “And then put ‘no allergies’ or something I don’t know.”

“You guys are so unprepared. I already printed my certificate off at my own home, even laminated it.” Greta perched on her bed smugly.

“Greta?” Buffy smiled sweetly at her. “Will you like, shut up? Thanks.”

The girls met up with the boys after twenty three minutes, according to Chloe’s ‘flashy’ new watch.

“What did you all put on your certificates?” Bev peered over Eddie’s which said ‘my whole life I thought I had every allergy under the sun but it turns out i’m only allergic to haters’. “Eddie you can’t put that.” Bev almost doubled over in hysterics.

“You can’t tell him.” Mike shrugged, grinning widely.

The sixteen made their way to Matron’s office, only just remembering which corner to round and which stair you had to dodge in order to not trip over.

“So who’s gonna knock?” Eric asked as they stopped outside Matron’s door.

“Yeah no not this again.” Bev sighed as she remembered how they wasted at least five minutes deciding on who was gonna knock on her door. She walked forward and gracefully knocked on the door and stood back.

“Six minutes late, but i’ll let it slide since its been almost two months.” Matron opened her door with the usual glint in her eye. They walked in not bothering to line up in any orderly fashion. “I see you’ve all forgotten your certificates.”

“Well I didn’t.” Greta flicked her hair off her shoulder.

“We weren’t told so we improvised.” Bev handed her piece of paper to Matron.

“Hmm.” Matron sighed gravely, taking everybody’s papers. “Well you all should know the drill by now, so i’ll send you back to your dorm rooms.” She ushered them out of her room.

“To our dorms we go!” Richie pointed upwards and set off down the stairs. Bev sighed for about the ninth time that day. She looked at east and north walking back to their dorms and smiled again.

This would do nicely, Beverly thought.

Eddie Kaspbrak, about to go into the food hall

“God I’m starving.” Ben sighed heavily. “Surely it’s lunch soon?”

“It’s like one o’clock.” Stan looked at his watch. “Should we head down?”

“Before Ben dies of starvation, yes.” Mike ruffled Ben’s hair.

“Yayyyyy! Here’s to food poisoning!” Eddie clapped sarcastically. Yes he’d missed Whitemore like absolute mad during the holidays and even sometimes fresh air during his first week back at home, but he did not miss the food. One plus to his mother was that she’d somewhat learnt how to cook. And he means one plus and one only.

“Forgot how much you hated the food here.” Bev chuckled and shook her head.

They headed down double the steps they had to go down to get to the canteen than last year and entered the canteen.

“And I forgot how busy this place gets. Looks like we’ve forgotten a lot of things over the summer.” Mike said as they dragged two of the available tables together as they always did.

“Especially me, I forgot how beautiful Eds’ mother was.” Richie sighed wistfully.

“For s-s-s-s-some-someone wh-who needs g-g-g-gl-glasses, y-y-yuh-y-you can sure s-see well in th-the dark.” Bill let a smile slip from his lips as he sat down next to Bev.

“Jesus Christ don’t say you’re both ganging up on me now.” Eddie groaned. They all waited at least ten minutes to see if the queue for the food was actually gonna die down but it didn’t so they sucked it up and just waited in the line.

“Certainly some interesting memories in here.” Richie said seriously, losing any accent at all.

“Sure were. That’s when I learned Mike couldn’t whisper for the life of him.” Bev laughed, picking up a tray from the rack, getting a ‘hey!’ from Mike.

“Let’s just hope Luke doesn’t retort with a round two.” Ben raised his eyebrows. “Yeah, three scoops of mash please.”

“I wonder if anyone new will join our year?” Stan suggested, grabbing a knife and fork.

“If someone does they better not be anything remotely close to a Luke clone.” Bev ruffled Eddie’s hair almost protectively.

They sat down and began to eat, as the British called it, ‘bangers and mash’.

“Do you think they call it bangers and mash because in the olden

days people banged before eating the mash?” Richie twirled his fork in the mash potatoes.

Stan dropped his cutlery and pushed his tray a little away from him. “Aaand I lost my appetite.”

Eddie yawned widely, playing around with his food so that it’d looked like he’d eaten more than he had.

“Tired, Eddie?” Mike asked.

“Sorta. I’ve been up since the crack of dawn brainstorming ways to get out of my house and head to the train station.” Eddie replied honestly. It was not easy. Not at all.

In the earlier hours of four am, near and about then, Eddie’s mother was an extremely light sleeper. A pin could drop on the bathroom carpet and her eyes would be open in a flash. The night before Eddie decided to make a spider diagram on a piece of spare paper he tore out from his English book, of which was used in his previous year at Whitmore.

He could have either; told his mum he was going to the train station and leg it down the stairs and out of the house before she could get a leg off her bed, but then she’d have probably locked the door and hid the key the night before so that wouldn’t work. Or he could’ve left out of his back door, which his mother continuously forgot to lock every evening, and somehow hop over his hedges and onto the path, but the hedges were a few feet high and lobbing his suitcase over it didn’t seem like a bright idea so he couldn’t do that.

And the final idea was leaping out of his window. Which was exactly what he did. Eddie dropped his suitcase down gently onto an overgrown rose bush, luckily not making too much of a noise, and hopped out himself. He wouldn’t say he unanticipated the height of his window to the ground too much, Eddie just blamed it on the fact it was half five in the morning and he’s knees just buckled from the tiredness.

But he made it. He was at Whitmore and he was sitting around the dinner table with the Losers, as well as the rest of east and north. God

knows what state his mother was in right now, for all he knew she could be having a heart attack. He shook his head to lose the thought. As much as Eddie disliked the dragon, it was still his mother.

“The fact you even have to do that makes me want to file a law suit.” Bev said, her red hair becoming a little bit more fiery at the thought of Sonia Kaspbrak.

“But anyway, enough of that.” Eddie picked up his glass of water cheerfully. “We’re all here aren’t we? That’s all that matters.”

“E-eh-e-Eddie’s r-r-ruh-r-right.” Bill nodded through his desperate stutter.

“To Whitemore.” Richie held his glass out.

“To Whitemore!” Everybody chimes and clinked glasses.

They were all there. The seven of them. And to Eddie, he could ask for nothing more.

Bill Denbrough, leaving the food hall

Bill Denbrough was trying his very best to forget about a certain six weeks. But, as hard as he tried, the words and events still echoed around his head.

All the other Losers seemed to of had great summers. Even Bev and Eddie had found ways to meet each other. But his summer had been the absolute worst thing on earth and he was 99% sure his parents wouldn’t allow him to come back after the second year was over.

Not that he ever wanted to go back to them anyway.

But even though he couldn’t fully shake away the dire truth his father had yelled at him, Bill still felt the warm, bubbly glow in his stomach. He’d been silent for almost the whole train journey but when they pulled around the mountain and got their first glimpse at Whitemore, Bill couldn’t help but smile.

It was standing there, upon the shimmering cliff face. The four towers were reflecting the golden light and Bill could pin-point North Tower without even trying. The whole thing looked so welcoming that Bill felt like crying.

At least he still had one home left.

And now that they'd met their new form tutor and had dinner, Bill was finding it easier and easier to laugh along with his friends. So what if his parents hate him? He has his true family right here.

"You know, I say we go back to the top of North Tower." Richie said as the seven of them were leaving the hall after dinner.

"The teachers would be sure to notice." Stan pointed out. "They're definitely on extra lookout today."

Richie did a dramatic sign and Eddie wacked him. "Stop being a drama queen."

"And you need to stop growing." Richie said. "I won't be able to rest my head on my spaghetti! Oh no, oh n-"

"Beep beep!" Eddie hissed, and Bill cracked a smile again. Yes, this felt like home.

The Losers began to walk up the grand staircase. At the top was Mrs Henderson, the form tutor for East and North First years and who Bill had had last year.

"Hello boys and Beverly." She said when they reached the top, a fond sparkle in her eyes.

"Hallo," Bev said, smiling. "You miss us?"

"Compared to these first formers." Mrs Henderson said, shaking her head. "Honestly, they get louder each year."

Bill laughed a little and that warm fire in his stomach flickered on.

"I expect you'll be working hard as ever this year." Mrs Henderson said.

“Of course, Miss!” Richie said. “I always work hard. Especially my-“

“B-b-b-beep b-b-be-be-beep.” Bill said, before Richie got too far and landed himself a detention on the very first day back.

Richie looked surprised for only a fraction of a second before he laughed and shook Bill’s shoulder.

“I was thinking of trying out for the lacrosse team again.” Mike said to a very concerned looking Mrs Henderson. “And Stan the man was going to swim again.”

“Well I look forward to watching that.” Mrs Henderson said. “You know, people say second year is always the best. Make the most of it.”

Bev sighed and rested her head on Eddie’s shoulder, who was now almost her height. “First year went past so quickly.” She said. “I hope this year slows down, at least for a second.”

Bill looked at her and remembered the car ride back to his house, the monopoly game board on his kitchen table, his bedroom slamming to block out the sound of his Mother’s sobs. He closed his eyes and tried to remind himself where he was: Whitmore. Whitmore, not his fucking house. And he didn’t need to think about that ever again. The second year was only just starting. He had months and months and months to hide away from the truth.

So why can’t he stop fucking thinking about it?

“You have a few more hours before you have to go to your dorms.” Mrs Henderson said, snapping Bill out of his thoughts. “Why don’t you look around your new common room?”

Bev and Eddie gasped and turned to each other and Mike grabbed Stan’s hand, grinning.

“Your giving us permission to do that?” Stan said, looking a bit lost.

“You could say that, yes.” Mrs Henderson replied, her eyes twinkling. “But now, I have to go and herd up these first years.”

He gave them one last smile then hurried away. Bill looked around at the Losers, all sporting matching grins.

“W-w-well,” Bill said, letting everything crumble away so he was just plain old stuttering Bill Denbrough. “W-w-what are w-we w-w-wa-waiting f-f-f-for?”

He grinned too and just like that, it was as if he was fine. As if his summer never happened. And if his fathers words were never said. And maybe Bill would start to believe he was fine, too.

“Race you.” Bev said, and zoomed off down the corridor, dodging kids. Eddie and Mike set off after her and Bill’s mind said “fuck it” before he followed, running to beat the devil.

Bev won, closely followed by Mike, who kept pointing out that “She had a head start!”. The seven stepped inside and Stan flicked on the lights.

It was slightly bigger, with long curtains and a large fireplace at the opposite side of the room. More sofas were there, too, positioned all around the room and there was even a bookcase, towering above the Losers in the corner.

“Whoa.” Richie said, adjusting his glasses. “Just imagine what it will be like in Top Form.”

“I heard they have mini kitchens.” Eddie said, walking over to the oak table to inspect it.

“Well I prefer our old common room.” Mike said stubbornly.

“You’re only saying that.” Stan said.

“Maybe.” Mike shrugged. “But it felt more homely.”

“That’s because none of use have been in here yet.” Eddie said. “Wait until the rest of North and East come to this place up after classes. Then it will feel like home.”

Mike signed and Bill ran his hand over the red sofa. Maybe it would feel more like home when everyone was here, when lessons had re

started, when everything went into the normal routine. But to Bill, without a flicker of a doubt, Whitmore already felt like home.

After all, he kind of needed it to. It was the only home he had left in the world.

Mike Hanlon, heading to North Dorm

“Man, that day flew by.” Mike said, walking along with the other losers to their new dormitory.

“My feet are hurting like mad though.” Eddie groaned.

“Aw Eds, want me to carry you to bed?” Richie joked, swaying towards the boy.

“Do not fucking touch me!” Eddie said, dodging round Bill.

Bill laughed and Mike felt something in his chest loosen. For the whole day, Mike had felt something glowing inside him. How could he not, being back at Whitmore? But it was obvious something else was on Bill’s mind. He’d been distant and quite, two things Bill never was. And today being when they returned to Whitmore just made it even worse.

Mike didn’t want to pry and ask Bill about something he clearly didn’t want to talk about but at the same time he did want to make sure his friend was okay. True, Bill was starting to loosen up slightly, but his eyes were still dimmed and there was something he wasn’t telling the losers.

Something big.

“Do you think our dormitory will be bigger too?” Ben asked, navigating them through the still very crowded corridors to North Tower. “Or will it be the same size?”

“I hope it’s bigger.” Bev said, her hair bouncing as she half skipped, arm linked with Eddie’s.

“If you want something bigger take on good look at my-“

“Richie, shut the fuck up.” Eddie said, leaning out to properly see Richie.

Richie pouted and Mike elbowed him good naturally. It did feel good, to be back with his friends. His farm was everything to him, and he loved it with his old heart, but even the sheep couldn’t keep him company all the time. No, the Losers were his actual family.

They all turned into the familiar corridor that led right to the bottom of North Tower. The cream painted walls had pictures of past school photos hung out in wooden frames, and small windows let the setting light filter through. It looked so peaceful, so ethereal, with the deep golden light warming the corridor. Mike could just see the dark oak staircase at the end, leading up to the five dormitories that homed the North students. It was home, and a damn good one at that. Mike didn’t feel out of place like he did when he would cycle around his old town and see all the public school kids. He didn’t feel like the odd one out. He felt like he fit perfectly.

“Well boys, it was fun talkin’” Bev said lazily, unlinking her sun-kissed arm from Eddie’s. “But I must be off. Have a good nights sleep!”

“Night!” Ben said.

“Goodnight Bev!” Stan called back as Bev dodged Richie’s outstretched arm.

“You know, for a second I actually forgot Bev belongs to East.” Mike said genuinely, shaking his head slightly.

“L-l-l-l-long s-s-su-summer, h-h-huh?” Bill joked, his voice strong despite his stutter.

“Long summer indeed.” Richie said, and Mike thought his voice sounded like a shadow of something. But then Richie turned around and grinned and that feeling faded away. He was just overthinking everything from Bill. Richie seemed totally okay.

“Let’s actually get to our dorm.” Ben joked, and continued to lead the Losers up the dark staircase. It creaked nimbly under Mike’s feet and

he was all too aware of how late it was. Normally, students would be asleep at least three hours before this, but Mike guessed the first day was always an exception. Even just walking up the stairs, he could hear the cries of people from around the whole school.

“Oh, wow.” Eddie said, and Mike looked up. They’d reached the door and Ben was holding it open, him and Eddie peering in.

Ben let out a low whistle and Eddie said “Was not expecting that!”

“Are you actually going to let us see or-“ Stan said, trying to look past Ben and Eddie.

They both stepped inside and Mike’s eyebrows shot up. The dorm was definitely bigger, and the walls and bedsheets were all an emerald green, verses the plain white they had last year. The window looked much bigger all together, pushed out with a little window seat. The beds still had the curtains that you could draw as you pleased and there was still the same wooden bedside tables but the dorm looked completely different to the first year one.

“Take your shoes off at the door.” Someone said, and Mike realised that Blake was sitting at the one of the beds. “Mr Johnston said he didn’t want us tracking mud in.”

Mike looked down and saw plush, red carpet as the floor. They really did go all out, huh.

He slid his shoes off and put them next to Eric’s, then looked up.

Their suitcases were in a heap at the end of their beds as they had left them and Mike immediately picked out his worn down one among the Loser’s. Blake and Eric had already picked their beds and were sprawled out over them, Blake reading and Eric writing something down.

“Matron done a room check yet?” Ben said, moving forward and aggressively hurling his suitcase out of the pile, creating a mini avalanche.

“Yeah, said the room already looked like a mess.” Eric said, and his Irish accent had become way more prominent then when Mike had

last seen him.

“You been spending too long with your family, huh?” Stan said gently, bending down to sort through the pile.

“That obvious?” Eric said, red tinting his cheeks.

“Now now no-“ Richie began in a god awful Irish accent before five people all beeped him at the same time.

Five.

Mike looked up and saw Bill grinning at Eric and his stomach did another swoop. Maybe Bill was just feeling homesick or something. He seemed to be getting better, becoming more like his old, care free self. Mike just hoped it lasted.

“Are we meant to unpack?” Eddie asked, throwing his suitcase onto his now chosen bed with ease.

“I think so, yeah.” Eric said, swinging his legs around. “But it’s late as it is, so maybe just get into bed.”

That idea was extremely welcoming to Mike, and he placed his suitcase on the bed closest to the door gratefully. The day had been amazing, of course, but his feet were starting to hurt like mad and the thought of staying up an extra half hour to pack away his things made his head hurt.

“Come on.” Stan said lowly to Mike, picking the bed next to him and taking his nightbag out. “Let’s do our teeth and get some sleep.”

Mike and Stan slipped into the bathroom, clutching their toothbrushes. The bathroom was bigger than their one last year, but the layout was basically the same: three toilet stalls at the end, one long basin and a mirror. Stan turned the tap around and let water splash down.

“I’m glad to be back.” Mike sighed, letting his toothbrush hover under the tap.

“You don’t say.” Stan joked.

Mike shrugged. "You forget how amazing Whitmore really is. I mean, the farms great, of course, but there's just something about Whitmore."

"I get you." Stan nodded, squeezing paste onto his toothbrush. "I don't think there's a place even remotely close to Whitmore."

"Definitely not." Mike agreed. They fell into comfortable silence for a few minutes as they brushed their teeth, one that didn't require them to talk to know what the other was thinking. They both felt at total ease with one another.

"What's do you thinks up with Bill?" Stan said suddenly. "I mean, I can't imagine its coming back to Whitmore."

Mike pursed his lips. "I don't know." He said uncertainty. "Maybe it's something to do with his parents. Maybe he really misses them or something."

"Maybe." Stan said slowly, but Mike knew he wasn't convinced. "I just want to be there for him. Him and all the Losers. Second year isn't going to be a walk in the park."

"Mmm." Mike said, watching the water swirl around the plug hole.

"Whatever happens though, we'll face it together." Stan said.

"The two of us?" Mike asked, looking up.

"The seven of us." Stan said.

"Oh." Mike said, and looked down as he felt his cheeks heat up.

"But the two of us as well." Stan said in a smaller voice and Mike smiled

"We'll be fine." Mike said, turning off the running water. "Second year won't be too difficult."

And second year definitely wouldn't be as crazy as their First Year. Surely nothing could top a fire, snatched on sleepover, fete and one long prank war. No, Mike highly doubted it. Second Year would be

way calmer than First.

Never had he been more wrong.

2. Act One, Scene Two; And so it begins

Notes for the Chapter:

The first proper day at Whitmore, where Mrs Wilson announces something exciting

Ben Hansom, leaving the Food Hall

“God I forgot how early we have to wake up.” Ben groaned as they walked to put their (almost) empty breakfast trays in the clean up box.

“It’s the first day of the week and I already wish it was Saturday.” Stan said tiredly, tucking his hair behind his ears.

“How do we even find out our lessons anyway?” Bev asked, scrunching her eyebrows together in thought. “Do we just ask?”

“No I’m pretty sure I saw our time table in the common room.” Mike remembered hazily.

“Why didn’t you tell us when you saw it?” Richie asked, it wasn’t exactly in a rude way of asking, it was Richie’s way. Everybody knew by now that you had to take all of Richie’s sentences with a pinch of salt.

“I didn’t want to ruin the mood, let along my mood.” Mike shrugged as they trudged up the stairs to the common room.

They walked in to find nearly all of east crowding over the sheet of paper that was stuck to the wall, of which was their time table.

“How did they know and we didn’t?” Eddie asked in confusion.

“Is that e-e-e-even a-a kw-kw-question at th-th-th-this p-puh-point?” Bill huffed a slight laugh, lightening up little by little. Ben didn’t know what was happening with Bill, or how his summer went, but he did know that the something that was up, it was gradually becoming lesser and lesser as he was back around Whitmore. It was like Whitmore had some sort of... power? Ben didn’t know what it was

or how it was but it was there. Like magic.

It wasn't a bad magic, not at all, it was a friendly, welcoming feeling. It's not as if Whitemore was haunted in that sense, it was hard to explain and Ben was struggling to identify it in his head, but it felt like Whitemore had open arms for everybody, no matter what was going on in their lives. Which was why Bill was slowly, but surely, getting a bit better each hour, because Whitemore was a home.

"Oh for fucks sake do we seriously have geography first?" Buffy wiggled her way out of the little huddle and flopped effortlessly down onto the sofa.

"It will most likely just be an introductory lesson, so it won't be too bad." Emily shrugged and sat down next to Buffy.

"I hope we actually have a sane math teacher this time." Eric's strong Irish accent filled the room.

"Sorry what?" Greta asked.

"...what?" Eric said slowly.

"I like couldn't understand a word you just said. Try speaking in English?" She scoffed.

There was an audible sigh from almost everybody in the room.

"Jesus Christ Greta it's been two days. Give it a rest." Chloe rubbed her head tiredly.

The first bell rang, making Ben jump a little from the lack of not being around them for six weeks. That was another thing he hadn't missed; the ear piercing bells that rang every hour.

"So what's after geography?" Beverly asked, her longer hair bouncing around her shoulders as they started to walk out of the common room.

"Math, then a bunch of other subjects I'm sure i'll care so much about." Patty replied.

“Here, I wrote our whole time table down in my note book.” Emily said, showing it to the losers.

“We have history last? Don’t wake me up if I fall asleep during the lesson.” Richie groaned dramatically.

“Like Emily said earlier, it will be an introductory lesson today.” Eddie re-informed.

“Still, don’t wake me up in any lesson actually.” Richie yawned.

Ben smiled to himself as he walked with north and east to their new math classroom, wherever that was. He hadn’t realised it but he missed the rest of north and east almost as much as he missed the losers. Not particularly Greta’s comments but it brought conversation so in a way it was alright. Ben had probably thought this at least one thousand times but he was glad he was back.

So glad.

Mike Hanlon, at the end of Math Class

“So fucking glad that’s over.” Richie said, wandering over to Mike’s desk. “Math has not changed in one bit.”

Mike laughed and pulled his bag straps over his shoulders. Their first Math lesson had just come to an end a few minutes before the bell and everyone was packing up, ready to leave. The whole of East and North took Math together, and Mike realised with some shock that he hadn’t seen West and South at all, apart from the train and around the school. His chest tightened slightly; he did not want a repeat of last year. True, they’d figured it out in the end, but for half their year they’d been on edge over the stupid prank war. And there was, of course, the whole Luke situation. But even though West and South had heard Eddie coming out, Mike had to admit that they didn’t tell. No, the defiantly shouldn’t of kept hold of that information for so long and no, telling Luke was a big mistake but at the time, Mike knew that had no idea about what Luke was really like.

But now they did. Now West and South knew exactly what Luke was

like and what he could do and Mike would punch his face without hesitate if he ever tried to mess with them again. Because this year was going to be Mike's year. No fights between the other side of the year, no bad blood with anyone, nothing. It was going to be a calm, pleasant year. He'd see if it wasn't.

"How for Geography." Eddie said, pulling Mike back to the present. "Funnnnn."

"Oh don't let's forget about the twenty minute break between second lesson and third." Bev said, grinning in the beautiful way Bev Marsh did.

The bell rang throughout the school and the seven got ready to leave when the door opened, and Mr Johnston slipped in. He whispered something to their new Math Teacher, Mrs Becket, and she nodded before clapping her hands.

"Okay everyone!" She said loudly, some of her penny coloured hair floating from her bun. "Your form tutor has just kindly told me that there's a urgent assembly you need to attend. Please follow him in a calm fashion!"

"Has just kindly told me." Richie mocked as the students began to file out of the room. "Why can't teachers just say 'told me'? Like, what's so hard about that?"

"That's all you noticed?" Eddie said, scrambling besides Richie. "Did you not hear her? Emergency assembly, calm fashion? This is reminding me of the fire!" He twiddled his fingers nervously and Mike's brain summoned up images from that night, the smoke, the clear night sky, the fire from the sick bay. He shook his head and walked on determinedly; this year wasn't last year. There was no fire.

"Don't be so stupid." Stan scoffed. "If it was a fire, there'd be alarms. See?"

"There wasn't last time." Richie said darkly and the all too unwelcomed memory of Richie's scared face at the Sick Bay window flashed in Mike's mind.

“O-o-oh come o-o-on.” Bill said. “L-l-l-lighten u-up. S-s-someone probably j-just broke a w-w-w-window or s-s-something.”

“Already?” Mike joked but Richie laughed and the balloon in Mike’s chest inflated. Bill had lightened the mood, of course. Good old stuttering Bill. Whatever was bothering him couldn’t be so dire. Right?

“So what do you think this is about?” Bev asked, fiddling with her back straps.

“Beats me.” Ben said. “I mean, it’s the second day back. It could be anything.”

“Mmm.” Mike said, feeling wary none the less. He knew it was stupid to feel worried about a small assembly but the memory of the fire was still vivid to him. He never wanted a repeat of that.

North and East continued to follow Mr Johnston through the school. The bell had rung now, and students were pouring out of lessons, flashing them weird looks.

“God these first formers have cheek.” Stan said after a small student stuck his tongue out at them.

“Not to be mean or anything but some of them are real assholes.” Ben said sadly, shaking his head.

“I don’t care what you say, we were not that bad.” Eddie said as their line entered the hall.

“I beg to differ.” Richie said quietly, but Eddie’s reply was cut off as North and East sat down.

To Mike’s surprise, West and South Second Years were already sat down. Of course, it wouldn’t of only been North and East called. But why only second years? Was Bill right? Could they be in trouble all ready?

Mike tried to pull his mind back to yesterday morning but for the life of him, he couldn’t remember doing anything wrong.

“Okay everyone, let’s quiet down please!” Mrs Wilson said loudly, earning herself instant silence. “Right, you’re all probably wondering why I’ve called you in today.”

“Can say that again.” Mike said under his breath.

“Well I’m pleased to tell you that it’s nothing bad.” Mrs Wilson said to the room of confused kids. “In fact, it’s rather good. As you all know, second years put on the Christmas Pantomime in December. Well, this year an aspiring play company asked to perform for us for free and we excepted-“

A babble of talk broke out immediately. Mike jumped up and turned to face Stan. “So we don’t get to put a play on?”

“I’m suing!” Richie said, looking completely stunned. “I.Am.Suing.”

“The f-f-f-fuck?” Bill said, over cries of anger and disappointment.

“Quite, quiet!” Mrs Wilson yelled, making the room of now fuming kids settle down. “However, yes however, this does not mean you won’t be putting on a play. Normally, West, South, East and North all work together as four towers to perform their play. This time, West and South will put on one play and East and North will put on another. I-“

More chatter broke out but this time it wasn’t with the low, angry tones.

“Oh thank you Jesus!”

“Count me the fuck in!”

“IM SCREAMING-“

“Ohmigod ohmigod I’m going to die!”

Mike turned around again, grinning ear from ear. A chance to put on a whole play for the school without the assholes in West and South? Heck yeah.

A million ideas were already flying around his head and by the

excited looks on the Losers faces, he could tell they felt the same too.

“We could use the ropes and make someone fly and then the lights could all change colour and then-“ Ben was rambling on and Richie was trying to yell something to Mike over the talking and Bev was gripping her chair like she was about to set off and drive it.

“Richie, speak up!” Mike yelled across his friends to reach the Loser the furthest away from him.

“I said we should include a lap dance!”

Stan rolled his eyes despite the smile and Mike choked back a laugh.

“WE SHOULD INCLUDE A LAP DANCE?” Mike screamed back at the exact moment the hall decided to go quiet.

His words echoed around the now amazingly quiet hall and Mike shot back in his chair. He could already feeling his cheeks heat up and woah the hall was so quiet. There was a low ripple of laughter as a response and Stan elbowed him. Fuck fuck fuck. Why did everyone chose the most inconvenient time to go silent? Everyone in second year had heard him, including Mrs Wilson.

“Uh, I’d just like to say that we are not performing a lap dance.” Mike said loudly, his eyes fixed determinedly on his shoes.

“I’m glad to hear that, Mr Hanlon.” Mrs Wilson said, and there was more laughter that fuelled Mike’s cheeks before she continued. “Obviously theses won’t be performed in December as we have the acting company for that but these will be put on late January for the whole school. I hope this gives you more creative liberty as now it doesn’t have to be Christmas themed but anything you desire. Of course, I must set some ground rules.

“Number one, you may beginning planning your play in your free time but everyone, and I mean everyone, from your towers must be included. If you have an issue with that, please notify me. Second of all, this is an independent task between towers but your form tutors and I are on hand if you do need anything. Third of all, and as Mike Halon has kindly pointed out, please keep these appropriate. I will

not hesitate to ban your plays.”

Mike stared aggressively at the chair in front of him, trying to focus on combusting into thin air. Unfortunately, he was still very much whole and not in flames, but Mrs Wilson had gone on;

“Fourthly, and this took some thinking, but I’ve decided to make this into a friendly competition. West and South’s play will go against North and East’s play. The other years will judge their favourite. But please remember the word friendly! As I understand, there was some rivalry between the towers last year. At Whitemore, everyone is family to each other, no matter what tower you’re in. If I get a whiff of any bad blood, the competition will be off immediately. And remember, this is all just for fun, I have no doubt in my mind that both plays will be spectacular.

“More information will be released in the near future but for now, please return to your class and have a great day!”

There was an uproar of chairs scraping across the ground as second year students got up and grouped together, talking in excited voices.

“This is single handedly the best thing to happen in my life, periodt.” Ben said, his eyes alight with a whole constellation of stars.

“A play sounds so fucking cool!” Eddie said, pushing his way to the door. “Imagine what we could do!”

“Rocky horror show.” Richie said definitely.

“Rich, there’s like, twenty nude scenes in that.” Bev grinned, barging through the door.

“And?” Richie said, as him and the Losers walked out.

“W-w-we h-have Sewing n-n-now, r-r-right?” Bill said. “Sh-sh-shit, I’m n-not gu-gu-gu-going to b-be a-a-about to c-c-con-concentrate.”

“You know how cool this is?” Mike said. “You know how many choices we have? Do you? Do you?” He already wanted to call an emergency meeting from himself to start planning the day, but he knew it would have to wait. Still, as they headed along to Sewing, he

caught sight of East and North and a smile grew on his face.

“We are so winning this.” He said, voicing his thoughts.

“Duh.” Eddie said. “No way are West and South beating us.”

His voice sounded calm but Mike could detect the anger there. He knew Eddie still hadn’t fully forgiven them for telling Luke his secret, even if they didn’t know what he would do. And for that, Mike was more determined than ever to win the play competition.

After all, the Loser were made for winning.

Eddie Kaspbrak, outside Sewing Class

Eddie’s summer had been more like a prison trail, if he was honest. Being locked in his room with his mother acting like a hawk as she paced outside was about to trapped as it got. But from the moment he had jumped out of his window and ran to catch a bus to the station, his whole body felt free and light. Like something heavy had been lifted off his shoulders. Even sitting in a dirty bus at six in the morning with two cases at his feet, everything felt so new and infinite, like a new start was coming.

And he guessed it was. A new year at Whitmore, a new chance. No left over mess from last year like the fire or the prank wars. And Luke didn’t need to be spared a single thought. No, second year was a whole new year, one which had barely started.

And Eddie was going to make it his best year.

“Please come in.” A man with fair hair said. North and East were lining outside their third class of the day, which was Sewing. Now they were in their second year, they had four new ‘DIY classes’; Sewing, Food, Crafts and Gardening.

Something that Whitmore really exceeded at was its range of classes and Eddie had never appreciated that up until now. But he had at least five new classes this year and although it all seemed exciting, that part of him that still hid behind his mother couldn’t help but feel scared. He could clearly hear his mum’s voice rattling on about the

germs and diseases and how he could die and Eddie couldn't switch the voice of. It was like a hurricane in his head.

But right now he was standing in between the Losers and that slowed his brain down, at least a little bit.

"Please come on and line up at the front as I place you all into a seating plan." Their new teacher continued, before leading North and East inside.

The classroom was fairly big, with different fabrics hung up on the wall like a mood board. There were shiny sewing mechanics on tables and a rack of clothes at the back. Eddie's eyes went immediately to the needle glinting at the sewing machine and hey, why doesn't Eddie's brain list all the ways he can die in this room? Number one, his brain goes into overdrive and explodes! Should of listened to our Mum after all!

Eddie bit his tongue and tried to shake the voice from his head. He attempted to focus on the conversation between Stan and Richie instead, just to remind himself where he was.

"I could sew my hands together--"

"Richie that's the dumbest thing I've ever heard."

"Oh you're so boring Stanny."

Eddie smiled a bit and let out a big breath. He hated himself for worrying about the smallest things but it's what his mum had taught him to do. Worry and stay safe, worry and stay safe, worry and stay safe. And Eddie didn't know if he would ever shake that.

"Okay!" Their teacher said, clapping his hands and shutting the class and Eddie's brain up. "I'm Mr Banks and I'll be your Sewing teacher this year. Sewing is a lot more than you think and exploring what we can created with a simple needle and thread is the whole part of this course. I'll put you all in your seats and then I'll tell you a bit more."

He started paring people off to a sewing machine between two each and Eddie turned around. "This doesn't seem so bad."

“It seems fun.” Ben said, shrugging a bit.

“This is reminding me of last years fashion show.” Mike said, looking at the rack of clothes in the corner.

“W-w-we c-c-c-c-could m-m-make t-the c-c-costumes f-for the p-p-play.” Bill said, smiling.

“One of you better be damm good then.” Bev said.

“Don’t count on it.” Stan said under his breath as Mr Banks came over. He paired Stan and Richie off together, Ben and Bill, Mike and Buffy and then Bev and Eddie.

“Why hello partner.” Bev said, linking her arm with him as they went over to their designated sewing machine.

“Fancy seeing you here!” Eddie said as they sat down, then both laughed.

“I’ve never tried sewing before.” Bev said, her fringe bouncing. “But it looks fun.”

“It does.” Eddie agreed, staring at the needle. “It really does.”

“Okay!” Mr Banks said, clapping his hands again. “We have three tasks over the course of this year. We’re going to start of by making a patch work piece, then a top, then your final independent challenge will be a complete outfit of your choice. But today we will start with some basics and the safety.”

After a long and particularly boring ten minute speech about not sticking your fingers under the sewing machine that Eddie knew Richie would ignore without hesitation, Mr Banks handed them each a square of plain fabric.

“What I want you to do,” He said, dropping a piece on Mike and Buffy’s desk. “is to sew three lines. One straight, on wavy and one zigzag to see your control on the machine. You will also practice setting up different colour threads. Off you go!”

Eddie and Bev spun around to face each other and grinned. A whole

hour with his best friend seemed perfect for the first day back. And really, how hard could sewing be?

Very hard, apparently. It had been fifteen minutes since the challenge had been set and him and Bev had yet to have set up their sewing machine.

“This is bullshit.” Bev huffed, aggressively turning a nob. “Why won’t it work?”

“Don’t know.” Eddie said, turning scales that he didn’t know what the hell did.

“Wait!” Bev said. “The needle moved then! Turn that again!”

Eddie did and sure enough, the needle began bobbing up and down, making a ‘brrrr’ sound to match the rest of the classes machines.

“Got there in the end.” Bev said, giving Eddie a low five.

Bev went first, laying her square under the needle and pulling it genetically along, threading a perfectly straight line. Eddie watched her nimble figures pull the fabric and smiled.

“Maybe you can make out costumes after all.” He remarked as Bev raised the needle.

“You need to work a sewing machine to make the outfits.” Bev joked, shuffling up to let Eddie have his turn.

Eddie flipped the dial and let the needle fall onto the white fabric. He pulled it along, watching sea blue thread imbed itself onto the patch of white. “Talking of costumes,” Eddie said, steering the fabric. “what do you want to put on?”

“I’m not sure.” Bev said, squatting her shoulders so she was level with the needle. “Maybe a romance? Like West Side Story.”

“Isn’t West Side Story mostly about gangs?” Eddie said, letting the needle run over because Bev raised it.

“True.” Bev said thoughtfully, switching places with Eddie. “Well, we

don't even need to do a musical. We could adapt a book or film or something."

"I guess." Eddie said, looking around the classroom. Everyone was chatting to their partners over the constant hum of the sewing machine while Mr Banks was at his desk, marking something down. Bill and Ben seemed to have somehow sewn across their whole fabric and Stan was restraining Richie from sewing his fingers together. Eddie's eyes fell to the clothes rack in the corner. There was dresses and chic looking T-shirts and leather jackets. It seemed so cool that they'd be making their own clothes for their own play.

"I like your idea about romance." Eddie said to Bev as she threaded a wavy line into her fabric. "It would be so nice to find love."

"I've already found love." Bev teased as Eddie turned around.

"Mmm, Billy boy." Eddie said, clutching his heart. "You're both so in loooove."

"Shut up." Bev said, finishing her wave. "I'm not in love, as such. More so..."

"In love?" Eddie said.

"Well if you know so much about it, who do you love?" Bev said, switching places with him.

"I don't love anyone that way." Eddie said. "And I'm not in love either."

"Sure." Bev said. "Sure you're not." Her eyes had that look as if to say 'I know something and there's no point hiding it'.

"Well I'm not." Eddie said stubbornly, trailing a wave over the square. "There's no one here I'd date anyway."

"No one, huh?" Bev said. "Absolutely no one? Not a single soul?"

"Nope." Eddie said, letting the waves of blue trail over his fabric.

"Okay, I'll let it drop." Bev said in a voice that told Eddie it would

never truly be dropped until he was probably married.

“Well what about you?” Eddie said. “Do you think you love Bill?”

Bev raised her eyebrows and looked down at her feet. “I mean-“ She said, “how can you ever really know that?”

“So is that a yes?” Eddie said slyly, pulling the last of his fabric.

“That’s a not sure.” Bev said, the end of her voice hitching.

“People can fall in and out of love.” Eddie said, getting up to swap places. “It doesn’t have to last forever.”

“That’s not true.” Bev said. “Once you love someone, actually love someone, and they actually love you back, I don’t think you can ever lose that.”

“You don’t?” Eddie asked.

“No.” Bev said. “Everyone has lost the idea of love and what it is and what it isn’t but pure love is something that has so evil.”

“But it hurts.” Eddie said.

“It hurts like a bitch.” Bev said. “But it’s pure.”

Eddie watched Bev sew in her zigzags carefully and thought over what she said. Bev wasn’t wrong because Bev Marsh was never wrong but Eddie had never thought of love in that way before. It wasn’t like he didn’t think of love; he did. But love was scary to him, and unpredictable and a hurricane of emotions he didn’t think he was ready for.

But Eddie was worried Bev was right about something else, too. Because Eddie was starting to suspect he liked someone. But that was stupid, wasn’t it? No way could he ever like someone, especially the person he was thinking of.

Right?

Bill Denbrough, French Class

Madam Rouge, their French teacher Bill was almost 100% sure had anger issues, rubbed off all the markings off the chalk board, despite the groaning of children who hadn't finished copying down a whole new set of French verbs.

"Miss, I was on the last two words!" Mike groaned, scribbling out his half written word that made zero sense to any of them.

The seating plan hadn't changed a lot from last year. The only difference, bar like two other things, was that bill had swapped places with Eddie and now sat next to Mike Hanlon. Mike would often talk about the farm over the holidays, chatting excitedly about how Delilah's sister had a lamb a few months ago in the early Easter.

Bill thought that farming life would be fun, and clearly very good exercise, especially better than his home life. He'd happily listen to Mike ramble on, it was nice. It gave him something else to think about. Over the summer, Bill had quickly learnt that sometimes it's not always the people that are the enemy, it's the mind.

"Hey, Madame, did you do something to your hair? Looks stunning you know, whatever you're doing keep it up!" Richie charmed in a subtle British accent that if you listened closely you'd just here an American accent with words pronounced slightly differently. The bell rang and they all walked to history.

The lesson went by in a flash, with new seating plans, new coloured books that they'd never seen as a book cover before, new teacher who Bill silently thought was a little high, and even new text books that had been written only the year before.

"Tell you what, that wasn't a half bad lesson." Richie nodded, eyes squinted as if he were some sort of intellectual.

"That's because we didn't do anything." Stan pointed out as they walked back to their common room.

"That's exactly what made it fun." Bev smirked opening the door to go inside. Just before Bill went in, something caught his eye.

He peeked around the wall to see someone he hadn't seen before. The boy looked rather tall and had a mullet for his hair style. Bill guessed it was somebody new looking around to join fifth year or something.

"Hey, Bill? Something caught your eye? I'd be careful because if it's a girl Bev won't be happy-"

"N-n-n-no Richie, it l-l-l-looks luh-like someone n-new." Bill stuttered hopelessly, still eyeing the new boy.

"Eh, I don't see any threat. I'm way hotter than that fellow anyway." Richie shrugged smugly as they continued back onto the building after they'd lost sight of him.

"Sh-sh-sh-sure Richie." Bill patted him on the back. "S-s-so, h-h-huh-h-how was your s-summer?"

"Not too bad Billy boy, not too bad." Richie said cheerfully, his face quickly becoming lightly concerned. "But, how was yours?" He asked more seriously.

"It w-w-w-was f-f-fuh-f-f-fine." Bill said placidly, looking anywhere but in Richie's eyes.

"Bill, you don't have to lie." Richie sighed, almost sadly. "We're friends, we trust one another."

Finally Bill sighed. What was the use of keeping it bottled up inside him? What was the use of making his blasted stutter worse day by day because he can't just tell the people that are closest to him what happened over the summer? Ironical, huh. Now that Bill thought about it, he was sure not telling anyone was a much more terrible idea than speaking aloud.

"Oh-oh-okay." Bill sat down on the second from top step, the common room being just round the corner from them. He could already hear the two towers laughing and chatting. Richie came and sat down next to him. "W-w-w-when I came h-h-home that day, e-eh-eh-everything w-was fine, or at l-l-luh-least I thought i-i-it was, and o-o-o-on the table, m-my mum h-h-huh-has set up m-m-m-mono-m-mon-m-monop-m-"

“Monopoly?” Richie finished for him.

“Y-Yeah.” Bill nodded gratefully. “And s-so a-a-a-after I t-t-tuh-t-took my s-s-s-suitcase to my room, I c-came downstairs and we b-b-be-began to play it. Again, e-ev-e-everything w-was fine, b-b-b-b-But then,” Bill stopped, the day becoming all too vivid all of a sudden.

“It’s ok, you don’t have to continue if you don’t want to.” Richie said gently, rubbing his shoulder.

Bill shook his head. “I have to.” He whispered and quickly continued. “B-B-But then she called m-m-m-me j-j-juh-j-Georgie. Wh-wh-which i g-g-guess was a s-s-s-simple mistake.” Bill quietly reasoned. “S-s-so my m-m-m-mum left the room c-c-cr-crying, wh-wh-which made my dad a-an-angry.”

Just thinking of his dad’s look of a mixture of anger and sadness made Bill’s eyes start to prickle absentmindedly.

“So, s-s-s-s-so then h-h-he said,” Bill struggled to talk with the increasing lump that was hatching in his throat. “Th-th-that he w-w-w-wuh-w-wished it was m-m-me, rather th-th-than Georgie.” A single tear rolled down his face.

Richie has stayed quiet the whole time, observing his best friend sadly as he talked about his very first day at home being a shit hole.

“I’m- I’m- I’m sorry. I kn-kn-know I’m p-p-pr-probably over th-thinking it. It’s s-stupid.” Bill wiped his nose with the back of his hand, not wanting to make eye contact with Richie yet again.

“Bill listen, it’s not stupid at all. Whatsoever. It’s your fuck ups you call your parents are what’s stupid. Bill why didn’t you write to us? Any of us at all?” Richie asked in fatigue.

“I th-th-thought y-y-you’d all th-th-think I w-was over r-reacting.” Bill mumbled quietly. That and he hadn’t dared to leave his room until late late evening when he’d grab a bag of crisps to make up for him missing breakfast, lunch and dinner. “B-b-But now what? Wh-whe-when I have t-to g-g-guh-go? Wh-what happens th-then?”

“You won’t go home. I won’t let you. You’ll come home with me.”

Richie said in a matter of factly tone. “Besides that’s months away, we’ve got loads of things to do in the mean time.”

Bill managed a small smile. “Th-th-thanks Richie.”

“For what?”

“F-f-for l-listening to me.”

“Well, sir, you be completely welcomed, shall we depart to the humble abode of our common room?” Richie smiled, portraying a posh slash un-posh accent.

“We shall indeed!” Bill copied, probably doing an even better job of it in the first place. They got up and Richie stopped.

“Oh and Bill, just know that you’re not alone. You have five other amazing friends and know that you can talk to them, ok? And, of course, the most amazing of all, me.” Richie reassured.

Bill nodded, making proper eye contact for the first time in half an hour or so. “I know.”

Richie was right, which was a rare occurrence, Bill had six friends that loved him like a family, and he wouldn’t change them for the world.

Notes for the Chapter:

my children are very precious we must protect

3. Act One, Scene Three; Everybody thinks too much

Notes for the Chapter:

ah shit, here we go again

Ben Hansom, in North's dorm

"Rise and shine, sunshine." Richie jumped up on Ben's bed and began to hop up and down on it, waking Ben up with a start.

"Jesus, you're up early, Rich." Ben rubbed his eye as he sat up, almost punching himself in the eye from Richie's repeated jumping. "Any reason or-?"

"Nope." He replied simply. Richie got off Ben's bed and moved on to Stan's.

"I would not do that if I were you, Richie." Mike said, still smiling subtly as if to say he still wanted to see how it would end.

"It's a s-s-s-Saturday. W-w-waking s-Stan up e-er-early on a s-Saturday is n-n-never a good i-idea." Bill chuckled lightly, sprawled out like a star fish on his bed.

Richie slowly took Mike's pillow, ignoring his groans of, "fuck, not this again." He drew back the pillow and just as he was about to smack it on his head, Stan's hand flew up and gripped the pillow.

"If that pillow touches one fucking strand of my hair I will single handedly snap the glasses off your head." Stan said, eyes still shut and half his sentence muffled into his pillow.

"Stan the man, I hate to break it to ya, chap, but you're sounding a wee bit like Greta Bowie." Richie shook his head sadly.

"Ok now you're just mocking me." Eric's voice floated from across the room.

"It's not my fault I have better hair than her." Stan continued as if Eric's sentence had never been spoken.

“He’s not wrong there.” Ben shrugged, getting out of his bed and making it. The fact they still had to wake up at an early hour even on Saturdays made absolutely zero sense to Ben. He obviously understood for weekdays but he’d love an explanation for weekends.

“Ok, six down, I think, and about two to go.” Richie said and flew onto Eddie’s bed.

The six got ready and headed down the stairs, arguing with Richie about whether cucumbers were a fruit or a vegetable.

“Hey Bev.” Ben smiled warmly as east met up with north on the way to the canteen.

“Hey Benny.” Bev replied. Ben smiled at the nick name, bending down to make it look like he was tying his shoe laces to hide the newly forming blush that was biting at his cheeks.

They made their way to the canteen, dragging their usual tables together and forming a line to get their food.

“And that’s exactly why cucumber is a vegetable.” Richie finished as they dumped down onto the seats.

“Richie, you’ve literally gave zero valuable points for your opinion.” Stan said, munching into a piece of toast.

“It’s not an opinion, it’s a fact.” Richie corrected.

“One of your points was literally, ‘it’s green and vegetable-ish so therefore it’s a vegetable’.” Eddie added, trying to hide his laughter by biting a crumb of bread off his fork.

“Am I wrong though?”

“Yes!” Everybody chimed.

They all munched happily, enjoying the odd beams of sun rays shining through the windows, giving a kaleidoscope effect on the canteen walls. He’d never noticed before, but as the sun caught it right, Ben realised that the walls weren’t normal brick walls, they were a silver-grey slate walls in the style of large bricks. Ben rather

liked the authentic look about it. It reminded him of his home walls, in the outside being not to do similar to the ones here. Ben smiled again.

“Students.” Mrs Wilson stepped into the room.

“Now what have we done?” Ben heard Blake’s voice from across the table.

“You’ve done nothing yet, Blake Everington.” Mrs Wilson said sternly. Blake shrunk back in his seat like a hedgehog hiding in its spikes. “Anyway, as I was about to say, the elections for head student will be held next week and you’ll have an assembly with the candidates later this week. You’ll be informed about it more with your form tutors.” With that, she left the room and the cafeteria returned to chatter.

“I wonder who the candidates are.” Emily said, sort of to herself and sort of not. Ben couldn’t really tell.

“Great. Now we have two things to think about.” Blake huffed.

“That too much for your little brain to handle?” Greta pouted sourly.

“Didn’t they like make out last year?” Eddie leaned over to Ben and whispered in his ear.

“I think so.” Ben swallowed a laugh as he remembered Bev and Eddie’s reactions to catching Blake and Greta making out on a couch. “Wished I hadn’t sat on that couch afterwards though, that’s for sure.”

“Matron probably pressure washed it anyway. Needn’t worry.” Eddie patted him on the back.

Ben smiled once again. Every little thing about Whitmore made Ben want to smile until he looked like an alien or a spas. He just couldn’t wait to see what the year had in store for them.

Richie Tozier, heading to the common room

“Richie stop moving so fast.”

“I’m not moving fast, I just have long legs.”

“Richie slow the fuck down.”

Richie sighed, stopped, and turned to see six very tired looking Losers attempting to catch up with him. It was Lunch and instead of eating, North and East had called an emergency meeting for the play. Yes they had till February and it was only September 8th, but Richie wanted everything to be ready and prepared. His head kept yelling new ideas at him and he knew if he didn’t share them soon, he’d explode.

So, that’s why he was practically running to the common room. Everyone else might be fine with taking their sweet time but Richie was already worried about how little time they’d have. Lunch was only an hour and with how long everyone was taking, it would take them that long to actually reach the common room. Despite it being Saturday, Matron had scheduled a Common Room check, meaning everyone would have to leave earlier.

“But it’s the first Saturday back!” Richie had said when she told him.

“And with you lot in there, I should of scheduled one sooner.” Matron had said seriously.

So even though no lessons took place on Saturdays, they still only had an hour in the Common Room.

“You guys are lucky you’re not on the track team.” Richie said as the six caught up with him.

“And you’re lucky I’m not going to punch your face.” Eddie said, coming up next to him. “Honestly trashmouth, we have plenty of time.”

“Mm, that’s what your Mum says at the start of the night, Eddie Spaghetti, but after five minutes in heaven-“

“Like you could last that long.” Stan said as the seven got into a line and started to walk in a (quicker) pace.

“Oh, Stan the Man gets off a good one!” Richie said loudly, making a few first formers jump.

“B-b-beep b-beep.” Bill said. Richie grinned at him and noticed Bev’s hand wrapped tightly around Bill’s. But Richie, who knew Bill Denbrough better than anyone, also noticed how Bill didn’t seem to be holding back that hard.

“Well, come on then.” Ben said. “Let’s not let the grass grow.”

They eventually arrived at the common room. Buffy and Emily were already sitting on the sofa, and Eric was pacing around.

“How long until everyone arrives, do you think?” Bev said to Buffy and Emily.

“Three and a half minutes.” Emily said, fiddling with Buffy’s hair.

“How’d you know that.” Eddie said, moving to one of the sofas to sit down.

“Guessed.” Emily said, and Buffy sighed.

Richie hopped over to the window and glanced out. The sun was blazing, today being quite warm. Students had their blazers tied around their waists and were running around the masses of grass, distant shouts drifting up to the common room window.

Richie studied the scene in front of him and sighed, watching someone kick a ball around. Everything about it looked so perfect. It reminded him to make the most of his second year, before it was over.

Suddenly, the door swung open and the rest of North and East trailed in.

“Finally!” Richie cried, throwing his arms in the air.

“It’s been five minutes?” Audra said in a slightly confused tone, glancing at her watch.

“Five minutes too much.” Richie said. “We have to plan this right

now!”

“Gee Tozier, you’re acting like a time bomb is going to go off.” Blake said, making his way over to the fireplace.

“Maybe he’s trying to see the future through his huge glasses.” Buffy said. “Tough luck though. Bet he can’t even see his dick through them.”

Emily gasped and covered Buffy’s mouth with her hand while the common room snickered. Seeing Richie being played at his own game was something that didn’t happen often.

“Your Mum would know.” Richie said quickly.

“It’s not just my Mum who knows how much of a failure you are.” Buffy said, leaning back on the sofa. “Especially in that department-Ow!”

Emily had wacked Buffy and Richie allowed himself a laugh. He knew better than anyone that harmless jokes were only harmless jokes if someone laughed. Still, he couldn’t help but wonder.

He glanced at Buffy and saw a easy going look on her face. She caught his eye and smiled slightly, a smile that told him it wasn’t deep. It wasn’t like before, like what Luke and his bunch had done. Richie really was home.

“I must say, I didn’t know you had that in you.” Richie said, tipping a fake top hat at Buffy.

“Are we ever going to plan this play?” Emily said, her huge eyes moving from Buffy to Richie.

“Yeah, you scold us for being late but then go off about sex jokes the moment we actually arrive.” Greta said, glancing down at her nails. “I know it’s probably the fact your brain has the attention span of a goldfish but really, you’re just starting to waste my valuable time now.”

“Do you ever stop?” Patty asked as Richie made his way to the centre of the common room. Greta shrugged.

“So,” Richie said, raising his voice, “as you know, we all have a play to put on. Yes I’m aware we have until February but the sooner we start planning it, the better it will be. Which is why I say we start now. I don’t know about any of you nerds but I want to beat South and West.”

There was a small cheer. Richie bowed before being heaved back by a very tired looking Stan. The room quieted and Richie spoke up again.

“Has anyone got any ideas? Because I really believe we should put on The Rocky Horror Picture Show-“

“Yes, because it’s the only time you’ll be able to see anyone naked.” Buffy said sadly, shaking her head.

“Well, if you want to volunteer so bad-“ Richie said, before getting a massive elbow in the stomach from Bev.

“A musical is a good idea.” Ben said as Richie recovered from Bev’s blow. “That way we can sing and dance as well as tell a story. So the people in here who feel as though they sing or dance better than act can have a go.”

“What musicals were you thinking of?” Chloe said, her arms crossed.

“We hadn’t, really.” Eddie said. “Maybe Hair or something?”

“What about All That Jazz?” Audra said. “It’s totally chic. My Drama Classes over the Summer used some of their scenes.”

“Yu-yu-yu-you t-take Drama?” Bill asked, looking up.

“Duh.” Audra said. “Can’t waste this much talent.” She joked, smiling.

“It’s a possibility.” Eddie said uncertainly.

“We could do Little Shop Of Horrors.” Eric said. “It’s more fun.”

“Isn’t it a tad young?” Alison said. “I mean, we’re like proper mature now.”

“Yeah, we get trains and everything.” Patty giggled.

“Okay.” Richie said carefully, everyone listening to him “So we want a musical, something with songs from all genres. It should be pretty upbeat but obviously have some sad parts too, something that ties in with the storyline. Oh, and there should be romance, maybe even heartbreak. It should be funny but also deep and the characters have to all be well developed and-“

“Grease!” Bev said. “We should do Grease!”

Richie looked at her, almost gasping. “Bev you’re a genius, I could literally marry you-“

“Grease is fucking perfect!” Alison said, clapping her hands.

“We could make the leather jackets-“ Mike said.

“And the songs are so good!” Eddie said, gripping onto Richie’s arm. “Remember when you played them for me last year? Richie, this is gonna be so cool!”

“I’d play the perfect Sandy!” Greta said, flipping her hair.

“We could choreograph dance routines-“ Stan said, his hair swinging as he turned around to talk.

“It would be so romantic!” Ben said, clasping his hands together.

“Grease is the perfect play for us!” Chloe said, nodding.

“Why are we making a play about oil?” Emily asked.

“We could get a real car in-!” Blake said, grinning.

“And make a funhouse set!” Patty added.

“And it would totally beat West and South!” Eric said.

The sixteen teens smiled at each other, their eyes alight with millions of ideas. Richie could of slapped himself for not coming up with Grease earlier; it was perfect. Not too serious but still a solid

storyline. It would blow their performance out of the roof.

His brain was already going into overdrive, ideas for the costumes and songs and lighting spinning around his head. He jumped up on the sofa and was about to project his thoughts when the door banged open.

“Richie Tozier, get your feet off my sofa immediately.” Matron said, shuffling in.

“You’re early.” Eddie said bluntly.

“Glad to see you can read the time.” Matron said, brushing down her apron. “West and South were busy so I came here first.”

“But we’re busy too.” Richie whined, disappointed. Now they had a play picked out, he wanted to plan everything right that second.

“I’m not walking all the way across the school, thank you.” Matron said.

“What were West and South busy with?” Eric asked.

“Their play.” Matron said, not looking up. “Sounds like they already have a lot of things planned.”

Richie groaned along with half of North and East.

“Fuck!” Patty said, flopping back on the sofa.

“Lucky I momentarily went deaf then.” Matron said, making Patty wince.

“We can take this somewhere else.” Richie said, thinking. “Maybe an empty classroom-“

“Can’t.” Stan said. “I want to tryout for the swim team.”

“But-“ Richie said, mouth open.

“We’ll plan it soon.” Buffy said. “But maybe not today. We can sleep on it, see what we come up with.”

"Sounds good." Greta said. "Uh, what are we talking about?"

"You all need to come up with ideas!" Richie shouted as North and East headed for the door. "Songs, costumes, lighting, dancing! We'll share soon, okay!"

"Sounds good to me." Chloe said, heading off a different direction to the Losers.

Richie signed. How the fuck was he meant to wait until tomorrow? He knew time would be on a treadmill till then, especially since they'd chosen what to perform. Still, knowing what they'd be putting on made it a hundred times better. At least his train of thoughts had a direction now.

A direction that would lead them to victory against West and South.

Stan Uris, at the pool

"The sign up sheet is around here somewhere," Stan said, half to himself. He and Ben were pacing auaround by the walls near the pool. "I'm sure of it. Unless it's in the same place as last year which would be stupid because it was no where near the pool whatsoever."

Stan remembered him and Richie signing up last year, and how he gave Richie this massive pep talk which probably boosted his ego ten times more. But no matter how much they joked or how much Stan pretty much resented Richie sometimes, he still loved him. He loved all of them, but again, if he were announce that, Richie would say one of his stupid lines and Stan would wish he could take the words back.

"Is that it?" Ben stopped at a wall which had a wooden board with paper pinned onto it.

"Huh, it is so." Stan said as he picked up the pen that hung beside it. "How'd you notice that?"

"Well the blown up picture of someone swimming on the sheet sorta gave it away." Ben grinned and shrugged his shoulders slightly. "So

when do you tryout?"

"Uhh," Stan scanned the sheet. "It says the eighth of September. When is that?"

"Um, Today." Ben looked at Stan.

"Today? But that means—"

"Stanley! So glad you could make it! I was wondering if you'd join the team this year." Mr Valley, their last year pe teacher ruffled Stan's hair. Stan tried to subtly swat his hands away. "Gonna need a bigger swim cap with that amount of hair!"

Stan grimaced. "So um, when's the tryout?"

"Five minutes, so if you are willing then you better get your swim stuff on. The team awaits." And with that, Mr Valley broke out into a jog, rounded the corner and to the swimming pool.

"Shit." Stan cursed, rubbing his hands down his face. "Didn't realise it was gonna be that soon. I wouldn't have dragged you out here if I knew."

"Eh, it's fine, I was looking to join the track team anyway." Ben smiled as he wrote down his name on the track sheet.

"Oh yeah, I remember you saying something about that." Stan said as they started walking to the changing rooms. It's nice to have something put your mind on hold, Stan thought. Whether it's a sport or a hobby or anything, something that can draw your mind away from something else. Stan thought maybe Bill should try out for a team, but it's different for everyone. Sometimes it's being alone, sometimes it's physically doing something, and sometimes it's just simply being around people you love.

"I just hope I'm not bad at it." Ben sighed. "I've always sort of liked running, but I don't think I've ever been particularly good at it."

"I'm sure you'll be great, Ben. If I don't see your name in those athletic magazines then i'll just sue the magazine company. See if I don't." Stan nudged Ben playfully and both broke down into laughter.

“So, any ideas for the play?” Ben asked.

“Richie sure has. He was practically bursting in there wasn’t he.” Stan huffed a laugh. “About half of them will be reasonable and the other half will be, well I guess, Richie ideas.”

“You aren’t wrong there.” Ben chuckled.

They arrived at the changing rooms and Stan began to get his swim gear out.

“Well, wish me luck.” Stan said as he came out of the compartment to Ben.

“You don’t need luck, Stanley Uris.” Ben grinned.

“I sure do need some help putting on this swim cap on though.”

Mike Hanlon, at Dinner

“It’s only Saturday and yet it feels like a month has passed.” Eddie sighed, taking a seat at the dinner table for the third time that day.

“The concept of time genuinely scared me sometimes.” Bev stated and Bill nodded in agreement. It was true, time could be the enemy, as Mike thought it was at the end of their first year at Whitemore, but time could also be sort of, Mike guessed, kind. Like it was now. Time was going nice and slowly to give them long enough to appreciate everything.

“Well, I don’t know about you but I’m having the time of my life.” Richie sat lazily on his chair, his lanky legs reaching almost all the way to the opposite end of the table.

“I swear if another person says the ‘t’ word I’m gonna leave.” Stan said flatly.

Richie sat up and bounced his leg up and down, biting down on his lip, gripping onto his chair as if he were about to take off into out of space.

“God here we go.” Bev let out a whimper of a giggle she’d been holding in.

“tYRANNOSAURUS REX!” Richie blurted and clamped his hand over his mouth. Emily giggled.

“Hey,” Ben said suddenly, looking over at South and West’s table. “What’s going on over there?”

They all looked over to see James and his clan standing up, talking to a blonde haired girl. She was quite short and had fair skin, a few freckles brushed over her face and delicately spotted her arms. On the other side of her was Thomas, arms crossed as if he were a body guard. The girl had her hands just up to her chin, shaking as they did so. Her eyes were constantly flinching open and closed as if the words that were being said to her were gun shots only just missing her. Mike vaguely remembered her name being Sandie.

“Who is she?” Greta asked scornfully.

“That’s Sandie. She was here last year but only like Richie spoke to her I’m pretty sure.” Ben explained.

Harriet from south tower, who was sitting closest to them all, pulled the girls hair down and a shriek came from the corner of the room. They all gasped.

“Why on earth-“

“Why the fuck would Harriet do that?” Bev cut off Eric angrily.

“She’s from south, of course she’s gonna do that-“ Richie responded.

“That’s literally not an excuse. Why the fuck would she do that?” Bev scrunched her eyebrows together. Mike thought her hair was getting just a bit redder at this point. Mike could only guess the reason she was getting so angry about someone yanking someone else’s hair; her dad. When Mike has first met Beverly, her hair was short. In fact Mike thought it was the same length as Eddie’s with a little bit more volume at the time. It had to be something to do with Beverly trying to escape but her dad catching her because of her long hair. Maybe Bev was having flash backs.

Mike looked over at Beverly who was touching her hair absentmindedly. If she was thinking about what Mike had guessed, then Mike was about to get a train to her home and beat the shit out of her dad single handedly.

“Maybe she’s a new girl.” Eddie suggested.

“I wondered if there would be.” Stan said gravely. “Hey ho, makes the year more interesting I guess.” He then said more lightly.

Bev rapped her finger nails on the table repetitively. “I’m gonna confront her.”

“Bev d-d-d-duh-d-don’t.” Bill placed a gentle hand on her shoulder.

“Why not?” Bev shot a look at Bill.

“It c-c-cuh-c-could have b-b-been play-pl-playful, we d-don’t know.” He replied. Bev’s shoulders eased just slightly.

“Fine.” She stood up and headed towards south and west’s table. Stan quickly jumped up and walked with her, a step or two behind.

“Shit.” Buffy glanced over at the losers. They all watched silently as she turned to walk to the washing up tub and dropped her plate into it, not once did she take her eyes off the table.

“If looks could kill.” Richie took his glasses off, wiped them thoroughly on his trousers, and placed them back on his head. “Oh that reminds me, Mike, could you stall Stan while we go to the common room?”

“Yeah, um, why?” Mike asked.

“Well, you know he got into the swim team,” Mike nodded, “Well we were gonna like hold a little surprise for him.” Richie replied.

“Sure thing bud.” He shrugged and nodded again.

“Richie how did you saying ‘if looks could kill’ remind you of that?” Eddie looked at Richie, confused.

"It didn't." Richie said.

"The why did- you know what, never mind." Eddie shook his head in despair.

"Oh I mind, Eds, I mind deeply. Please, do tell." Richie leant his elbow on the table and winked at Eddie.

"Beep beep." He said, watching as Bev sat down.

"Right," Stan said. "Should we head?"

They all got up, Mike desperately thinking of a way to keep Stan back.

"Hey uh Stan?" Mike looked out the window.

"Yeah?"

"I have something to ask you." Mike said, trying to hide the uncertainty in his voice.

"And that is..?" Stan narrowed his eyes in confusion.

"Um its easier if I show you actually." Mike grabbed Stan's arm and started pulling him out of the other exit of the canteen.

"Shouldn't we tell the others where we are going? Or for that fact, me?" Stan resisted slightly but it didn't feel like he was trying very hard.

"Nah, it won't take too long." Mike reassured.

"This is beginning to sound dodgy, I'm gonna be honest."

"Stan relax, just follow me."

"Can't exactly go anywhere else with your grip on my wrist."

Mike's cheeks began to heat up and he stopped and looked at Stan pointedly. He held up his free hand in defence. "Ok ok! I'm sorry!"

They made their way out onto the field as it slopped up just so they

could see the very chimney tops of houses. The sun was almost completely submerged by the horizon by the time Mike stopped to take a breather.

“So, why are we out here again?” Stan puffed lightly.

“Well, earlier today I saw this bird and I was going to ask you about it but then within about three seconds I uh,” Stan looked at him with uncertainty. “I forgot so I thought I’d ask now.”

“Ok... what did it look like?”

“Well uh,” Mike looked around and suddenly caught sight of a bird. “That! I’m pretty sure it was that one.”

“Mike that’s a pigeon.”

Mike quietly cursed and looked beyond it. “Ohh, not that one, silly me, the one behind it - behind the pigeon.”

“Well that is quite a contrast but that one is called a chaffinch. It’s particularly famous for its blue and orange head. And see that sort of lined pattern of black and white on its wing? Below that on his body is a rust red ombré..” Stan rambled on and on about this so very famous chaffinch bird and instead of looking at the bird, Mike looked at Stan. His hair danced happily around his shoulders as if his body was now flourishing at the talk of the species he loves. Stan’s eyes looked particularly breath-taking in the dying light...

“And that’s why a chaffinch is called a chaffinch.” Stan finished, watching as it delicately flew away. It was now almost completely dark; the sun had set for today.

“Interesting. Welp, thank you for that, we should probably get back to the others.” Mike nodded and started wandering back, Stan not too far behind.

“Hey, Mike?”

“Yeah?” He turned around to look at Stan.

“Thank you for bringing me up here.” He smiled.

“Why?” Mike asked, not being able to help himself but smile.

“Because you reminded me of what I love. Truth is, I only went bird watching twice in the summer, my dad was always too busy. So thank you.” Stan explained as they continued to walk again.

Mike placed his arm around Stan’s shoulder and smiled at him.
“You’re welcome.”

Beverly Marsh, in the common room

“He’s coming!” Greta shouted, dodging back into the common room.
“Everyone hide!”

Bev ducked under the sofa, bumping into Bill’s shoulder.

“After he’s turned on the lights!” Eddie hissed.

“I thought it was once the door shut!” Patty said back.

“Everybody SHUT UP!” Audra screamed, silencing the room.

No one spoke, waiting for Stan Uris to walk through the common room door. It had been a few hours since he’d gone to the swim team tryouts. He had made the team, of course, but everyone wanted to give him a proper well done, something that actually showed their appreciation, or something like that. So they were holding a mini surprise party.

And when Bev thought it was mini, that was an understatement. There was a jug of what looked like apple juice or some very off water and a few slices of bread that according to Bill “P-p-posh people e-eat a-a-all the t-t-time.”

But that wasn’t the point. The point was that Stan had made the swimming team and they were all celebrating that. And they were back at Whitmore, of course, which seemed like a celebration in itself.

But most importantly Bev was not at all thinking about the play in the slightest. Because thinking about putting on Grease for the whole

school and getting a standing ovation and beating West and South wasn't the most amazing thing ever.

So maybe she was thinking of it a little. But she didn't have it as bad as Richie, at least.

Bev shifted, as Stan and Mike's footsteps came into focus. Her heart fluttered lightly against her chest as the door handle turned with a groan and Stan and Mike walked in.

"Surprise!" Bev shouted, jumping up from behind the sofa with her arms out. Everyone else had done the same, apart from Emily who had cried "Get well soon".

Stan looked behind him then back into the room. "Oh."

"You surprised, buddy?" Mike asked, patting Stan's shoulder.

"Um," Stan said, looking around the room. "May I ask why I was just bombarded with yells?"

"Because we really enjoy jumping out at people from behind sofas." Bev said, running over to him.

"Because you made the swim team, idiot." Richie said, joining Bev at the door.

"Hence the party." Ben said, walking over and handing Stan food.

"Is this a slice of bread?"

"So, what was it like?" Bev said, linking arms with Stan and leading him further into the room as the talking resumed. "The tryouts?"

"Oh, good." Stan said, his long hair wavier than normal, probably from letting it air dry. "We swam a few laps for Mr Valley and he picked."

"Sounds fun." Bev said, walking over to a sofa that the Losers were taking over.

"You find the weirdest ways to sit." Stan said, glancing at Eddie who

looked like he was half in the splits.

Eddie shrugged, "It's comfy."

Bev squashed between Ben and Bill as Stan sat down in a much more normal fashion on the arm of the sofa.

"Did you see anyone on any other teams?" Ben asked, craning his neck to see Stan.

"Saw some fourth years from all Towers." Stan said. "James, Phillip, Harriet and Anna joined from West and South, and obviously Chloe, Blake and Eric tried out. But no one new joined."

"You'll e-e-easily bu-beat t-th-them a-again." Bill said, dipping a slice of bread into the dodgy apple juice.

"Gross." Eddie said, wrinkling his nose.

"Y-y-you have n-no t-t-taste." Bill said, waving the bread near Eddie's face.

Eddie awkwardly dived into a head of limps on the sofa to avoid Bill's soggy bread and ended up smacking his head on Mike's knee. There was a loud slapping sound then a small "Ow".

Eddie lifted his head up, eyes wincing slightly. "Mike, are your legs concrete?"

"It's from all his heavy farm workout." Richie laughed as Bill helped Eddie into a sitting position.

"S-s-sorry." Bill said tenderly.

"It's not your fault, Big Bill." Eddie said, tilting his head back. He turned and looked at Stan. "I interrupted you. Sorry."

Stan waved him off, "Stop being so posh, Kaspbrak."

"Yeah, Eddie will start drinking tea soon." Bev joined in a bit awkwardly, leaning forward on the sofa

"What, we are in England." Eddie said, giggling slightly. Bev laughed too, but something felt... off. Like she'd missed a beat. The six of them had all been getting along fine without her. That didn't mean they didn't need her, of course, but when she'd said something, it felt... different. Last year, she fitted with them so well. But now, it felt like something had shifted. Second year would be different to First year, that's what she thought. Well, was she different too?

"I did see something, though." Stan said, breaking Bev out of her thoughts.

"Oh yeah?" Mike said, looking towards Stan.

"Once I got out the pool and headed for the changing rooms, some South girls were huddled by the fields. I can't be sure but I think they were holding something." Stan said, his hands pressed down on his knees.

"W-w-was t-that girl w-w-we s-ss-saw earlier t-t-there?" Bill asked.

"I don't think so." Stan shook his head. "Maybe it's something to do with her."

"This whole thing seems weird." Eddie said. "Like they're planning something."

"Maybe they are." Bev said, looking around the common room at everybody. "I mean, that's not totally unlike them, is it?"

"They wouldn't do that again, would they?" Richie said.

"They might." Ben said fairly. "It's a play competition."

"Yeah, and if they can find a way to guarantee a win, they'll take it." Mike said looking at the door.

"We can't just let them!" Richie said, jumping up and tripping slightly on a cushion that had been knocked down. "There must be something we can do."

Bev pursed her lips. "There is one thing." She said.

“What’s that?” Eddie asked gently.

“Spy.”

Notes for the Chapter:

yeehaw

4. Act One, Scene Four; Old habits die hard

Notes for the Chapter:

someone from the past joins Whitmore and East and North continue to plan their play

Eddie Kaspbrak, in North's Dormitory

The sun bled into the fresh pink sky once again as the students from Whitmore woke up. It was a cloudless day, making it possible to see the pale, watercolored sky.

It was perfectly visible from North Tower, and in particular from a certain window in the Second Years dormitory.

Not that anyone was paying attention to that, though. There was a more important issue. An issue that was the line between life and death. The issue being-

"WHERE THE FUCK HAS THAT SPIDER GONE?" Eddie Kaspbrak shouted, standing on his bed.

"It was right there." Eric O'Connor said, holding his empty night glass in his hand.

"If that thing isn't found by tonight then I'm sleeping in the common room." Blake said seriously.

"It was tiny." Eric said, still looking around the floor.

"Tu-tu-tiny? I-it w-w-was as bu-bu-big as m-my p-pu-palm!" Bill said, cowering on his bed.

"Was not." Stan scoffed.

"Wu-wu-was too." Bill said, throwing his pillow at Stan.

"It was a small garden spider." Stan said, easily catching Bill's pillow.

"So you know spiders as well as birds now?" Eddie said, still looking around the dormitory. It wasn't like he was scared, he was just...

okay, scared. But he was perfectly within reason. The spider, that had been above Blake's bed when they'd all woken up, was huge. And his Mother had always told him, insects like spiders carried diseases that could be passed to you through one small bite. To think, the spider could have already bitten one of them in their sleep! With their long legs and eight eyes and how fast they moved, Eddie thought, quite simply, that spiders were devil spawn themselves.

"I think I see it." Eric said, crawling under a bed.

"Don't hurt it!" Mike said, running over to assist Eric.

"We really need Bev for this." Stan said.

"We need Bev for most things." Richie said, kneeling at the front of his bed in an attempt to see where the spider was.

"Got it!" Eric said, reversing from under the bed.

"You okay there, little buddy?" Mike said quietly, looking through the glass.

Eddie opened his mouth, shut it and shook his head. He wasn't about to question Mike. Mike Hanlon was someone you never questioned because chances were, Mike was actually doing the right thing. Even if it did seem a bit dumb.

"Oh-oh-okay," Bill said, as Eric and Mike left to let the spider out, "who wu-wu-wants to w-w-wake Bu-bu-bu-bu-ben?"

Fifteen minutes later and North were heading down for breakfast, only slightly later than usual. The food hall was loud with talk and the smell of sausages and eggs wafted over.

"Smells like piss." Eddie said, if anything to keep up the 'I-hate-this-food-it-could-kill-me' act that he put on for no other reason than his Mother had taught him to be wary around food. And Eddie didn't think he'd ever shake some of her lessons.

They walked in and saw Bev sitting alone at a table. Eric and Blake went to join whoever they were sitting with and the remaining Losers flooded onto their resident table.

"There you are!" Bev said, looking up. "I was about to move to East's table!"

"There was a spider." Richie said, sitting down.

"A massive one." Ben said. "Apparently, anyway. I was asleep."

"Ah." Bev said, smiling. "Well, can we please get food now? I'm starved."

They all joined the line and returned to their table with steaming plates of food. Even Eddie had scrambled eggs, something he didn't absolutely hate.

"You know, I don't understand." Stan said, looking at Mike. "You live on a farm but don't eat milk and eggs."

"Incorrect." Mike said, taking a bite from his jam toast. "I eat the eggs and milk that come from my farm because I know the animals and kept well. But my Dad told me about how some animals are kept. Tiny cadges, all pressed up together. It's awful." He shook his head sadly. "I'm not asking anyone else to stop eating anything, but unless I'm 100% sure on how well the animals were kept, I won't eat it."

"Mike was even nice to the spider this morning." Richie said to Bev, leaning over Eddie's plate.

"Ugh, get your elbows off my food!" Eddie said, pushing Richie's arms.

"Why? Scared you're going to get cooties?" Richie said, trying to tickle Eddie.

"As if!" Eddie said, trying to dodge Richie. He failed, and banged his leg loudly on the table. The hall fell silent for a minute and Eddie saw at least a dozen faces shoot him confused looks.

He looked at Richie and they both burst out laughing, their voices echoing around the hall. Gradually, the talk continued again.

"Idiots." Stan said, looking around the hall.

Eddie just laughed again, leaning his head on Richie's shoulder. If last year had taught him something, it was to not do something differently because people would approve more.

He leaned more into Richie's hair, that smelt of bubble gum and grapefruit, before catching sight of someone sitting at the Top Formers table.

He shot up, laugh dying at his lips.

"Eds?" Richie said, but Eddie hardly heard him. He was craning his neck to make sure he saw who he saw.

"No no no." Eddie whispered, looking past the heads of students.

"Eddie?" Ben asked. "You good?"

Eddie caught sight of them again and almost had a heart attack. No way. No fucking way. This was not happening, this could not be happening, this was-

"Bev." Eddie croaked.

"Yeah?" Bev said, sounding slightly concerned.

"Who's that?" Eddie said pointing over the heads of people to the table at the back.

"Ooh, Eddie's gone and seen a total hottie." Richie mocked.

"Shut up." Eddie said, making Richie blink in surprise.

Bev followed Eddie's finger and her mouth dropped open.

"Holy shit." She said.

"You gonna explain...?" Mike said.

But Eddie didn't think he could even if he wanted to. All the punches and blood drawn when he got caught cycling, all the words written on his locker, all the laughs and shoves and hours spent crying. How can the cause of all that be her when it was meant to be back at

Derry? How?

Bev spoke for Eddie, though. "Henry Bowers." She said breathlessly. "He's at Whitmore."

Bill Denbrough, outside History Class

"I du-du-don't u-understand s-s-s-shit and we're n-not even du-du-doing anything." Bill said, looking at the board through the classroom door.

"What is there to not understand?" Stan said, joining Bill at the door. "It just says understand the triggers for a cold war and name key points?"

"Nah, I agree." Ben said, walking next to Stan. "How can a war be cold?"

Stan turned around, "Did you actually--"

Ben raised his hands and was about to reply when the door opened and Bill jumped back in surprise.

"Good morning class." A woman with a short, blond cut and maroon blouse said. "Can we please all come and find our seats in a calm fashion."

Bill, being at the front, led North and East in. Last year, they'd had a pretty nice History teacher, Mr Lantic, but even he had put them in a seating plan. If their new teacher let them chose their seats, Bill thought History would be a pretty easy class this year.

"S-s-score." He said to Mike as they threw their bags down on the table at the back. "T-t-this class w-will b-b-be a b-b-breeze."

"Yep." Mike, who was particularly good at History, grinned. "Who gives a shit about cold wars anyway?"

The rest of the class filled in. Richie and Eddie got the table by the window, Stan and Ben, both who were pretty good at History, sat closer to the front, and Bev sat with Patty and the table along from

Bill's.

"Okay class." Their teacher said, her heels making snapping sounds across the floor as she walked over to the blackboard. "My name is Ms Shamming, and I'll be teaching you History this year. Now our starting topic will be on the cold war and how the events shaped History. Next--"

Bill, who didn't really care about History that much, slumped back in his seat and nudged Mike.

"Have y-y-you gu-gu-got paper?"

"Why?" Mike asked, leaning down and carefully opening his bag.

"M-m-mash."

"Mash?" Mike asked, placing a piece of paper on the desk. "What, like mash potatoes?"

"Nu-nu-no." Bill said, sliding the piece of paper in front of him. "Y-y-you pr-pr-predict the f-f-future."

"With a piece of paper?" Mike said.

Bill wrote out M A S H and then a series of options while explaining how to play. In a few minutes, Mike was already going to live in a hole in Chicago, with three cats and work as a postman.

The minutes flew by as Bill and Mike wrote down options and drew swirls with their pencils. Bill had forgotten what it was like to just be around someone who radiated the sunshine. Of course he was with the Losers the majority of the time but there was something so golden and pure about Mike. It was nice, just spending time with him

"William Denbrough and Micheal Hanlon!" Ms Shammings shouted from the front. "Can you please read what's on that paper for the class?"

Bill and Mike looked at each other and it took Bill everything he possessed not to break down laughing. The sheet had Mike's Mash game written down and half of Bill's, which consisted of becoming a

stripper and living on the moon. They were royal screwed but Bill didn't even feel nervous. In fact, part of him wanted Ms Shammings to read it, just to see what would happen. Like a dare.

But that was just because him and Mike were messing around. He still cared about class and school and the consequences, unfortunately. Because the truth was, Bill Denbrough never wanted to care again. He didn't want to care about life outside of Whitmore, didn't want to care about the parents that didn't love him, that basically wished him dead. And it's lot to blur out, so much to blur out that Bill guessed, without even realising it, some of it had leaked into Whitmore too. He was starting to feel numb to anything; to the play everyone was so excited about, to Bev and Eddie seeing Henry Bowers, to Whitmore, the one place that he felt safe and known at. The only thing that was still vivid, that still made him feel was the Losers.

But now that Ms Shammings was glaring at him from across the classroom and Bill couldn't find it in him to care, he was starting to question that too? Would everything eventually fade into black and white? Even the Losers? No, surely not. He was upset, that's what Richie had said. But that wouldn't last.

Please may it not last.

"It says," Mike said, clearing his throat. "Um... The cold war was an interesting war between countries. The winter weather made it... more difficult as soldiers ended up catching hyperthermia and-"

"A-a-and chl-chl-chlamydia." Bill said, because it sounded like a illness one could catch from the could.

There was a brief silence where every single head in class was a image of shock as they stared at him and Mike. Bill got the feeling, very suddenly, that maybe a Cold War was something different.

"It also says that Ms Shummings is a great teacher and that she looks very pretty right now." Mike added nervously.

Ms Shummings raised her eyebrows then turned around and seemed to bang her head on the wall.

“Dude, I totally messed that up!” Mike whispered to Bill. “I think a cold war is like a war but without a fighting.”

“You’re a tu-tu-total wh-whizz at h-h-history, how d-did you nu-nu-not know t-that!” Bill hissed back.

“I wasn’t thinking!” Mike said honestly. “You must be rubbing off on me.”

“H-ha ha”. Bill said as Ms Shamming turned around.

“Alright.” She said, looking as if death was a better option than her current life career. “You will both pay extra close attention in this lesson and by the end of it, both your books will be full with a clear description of a cold war. Got it?”

“T-t-totally.” Bill said as Mike muttered a small “Yep.”.

“Good. Now, can I have two volunteers to hand out the books please?”

Bill leaned back in his chair as Ben and Alison came around with books, his face burning only a little bit. The whole class had watched that go down and although he knew them all, that annoying part of his brain still told him how stupid he looked.

Which he usually didn’t care about. He knew he was a verified dumbass and he owned it. But apparently you stop caring about one thing and start caring about another.

A scrunched up ball of paper dropped onto his desk at that moment. It broke Bill away from his thoughts, at least, but the first thing that entered his head was that it was probably a letter saying “Massive idiot!” or something along those lines.

He opened it with a sort of sinking feeling, hating the path his life had suddenly gone down in the last few months. However, no crude drawings of Bill were inside, like he originally thought. Instead, there was a familiar small scribble.

‘Chlmida? You’re such a dummy xx’

Bill looked over to Bev, who was smiling her golden smile.

“Dude, she’s flirting with you.” Mike said up close to his ear, making Bill jump.

“Y-y-you th-think?”

“Duh!” Mike said, throwing his arms in the air and almost wacking Alison as she handed him his book. “Girls only pass messages to flirt. It’s like, 101 knowledge.”

“O-oh.” Bill said uncertainty.

“Have you ever flirted with her before?” Mike said, his voice dropping.

“Y-y-yeah.” Bill said. “L-l-like um...um...”

“How do you even have a girlfriend?” Mike said. “You can’t even flirt!”

“T-t-there’s m-more to lu-lu-love than f-f-flirting.” Bill said, leaning back. “A-a-and if you m-m-must kn-know, o-our first k-k-kiss was v-v-very romantic.”

“You were trapped in a Geography classroom!” Patty called over from Bev’s side.

“H-how does s-s-she know t-t-that?” Bill asked, turning around and almost giving himself whiplash.

“Friends tell each other about their love life.” Bev shrugged, a small smirk on her face. “And we almost kissed in the classroom. Unfortunately, we were rudely interrupted.”

Bill just stared at Bev and Patty, never feeling more intimidated. Since when was love so complicated? Hadn’t him and Bev been getting along fine? They’d hold hands and kiss and hug and-

“They’re out for you.” Mike whispered into Bill’s ear.

“W-w-what?”

“Out. For. You.” Mike said. “They must be plotting something against you or something.”

Bill turned around and saw Bev and Patty both looking at him, matching grins on their faces. When Bill caught Bev’s eye, she waved.

“Shit, y-y-your r-r-right.” Bill said, turning back around.

“You have to write the best reply you can.” Mike said. “Something edgy and sweet but also closed off and- what are you writing?”

“H-h-here.” Bill slide the sheet over to Mike, which now said ‘But I’m your dummy!’ with a collection of hearts drawn underneath it.

“Dude.” Mike said, then shook his head. “Something that’s not so cheesy.”

“L-l-like?” Bill asked, thinking the whole thing was way too complicated for a Monday History lesson.

“A poem.” Mike snapped his fingers. “I do love thee, as one would hope. And our love is stronger than a fishing rope. I do hope we meet again in another life. But until then, I have your eyes-“

“Micheal!” Ms Shammings called from the front. “How many times?”

“Yeah, right sorry.” Mike stammered, bending his head.

“W-w-wow.” Bill snickered. “D-didn’t k-k-know you h-had such a w-w-way with w-w-words.”

“Whatever.” Mike said. “You gonna write something?”

A small click sound rang out next to him and Bill jumped for the third time that lesson. Bev had rolled her pen off her desk and was now kneeling down by Bill.

“Cat got your tongue?” She whispered, her eyes the exact colour of the ocean.

“Y-y-you spelt ch-ch- chlamydia w-w-wrong.” Bill said after a good ten seconds.

Bev let out a laugh and Mike patted him on the back and they both seemed so right in themselves, so content with everything, like they didn't doubt themselves for a second.

And through all the right, Bill Denbrough still felt so wrong.

Richie Tozier, the Common Room

"So Beverly," Richie lied down on the common room floor, hands behind his head.

"So Richard," Bev replied, moving so she was in the same position beside him.

"Y'all should really let your lunch go down first-" Mike said while sitting down on the chair by the fire place.

"When were you planning for us to spy then?" Richie quizzed.

"Well if you see my sketch board of markings I've made about this plan you speak of, then we should be going in about t-minus three point seven minutes." Bev held an imaginary chalk board above Richie's face, pointing at it as if there were actual sketches. "But of course this is just a draft."

"Well I guess we better buckle up porcupines because we have under three minutes to get this show on the road." Richie pointed to the ceiling.

"That's ironic." Stan said flatly.

"Tell me about it." Eric chimed.

"Rich, of course I don't have a plan." Bev dropped her arms by her side, moving to face Richie. Richie looked at her. Really looked at her. Her pink chapped lips. Her rosy freckled face. Her fiery hair which Richie was sure had at least grown ten inches of however measurement worked since last year. And her eyes. God her eyes. They were a hazelnut twang with a subtle green filling, plus the sparkle that never truly fades. When it does, that's when Richie

knows there will be an apocalypse or something.

Richie didn't like her, not in that way. He couldn't do that to Bill, or Ben if he thought about it.

"Take a picture it'll last longer." Bev teased, manoeuvring back onto her back. Richie snorted.

"Ok well since no one has a plan, let's just wing it." Blake suggested, touching up his hair.

"Spectacular idea, dingus." Buffy rolled her eyes.

"No, I think Blakey over here is right." Richie sat up, letting some of the blood rush back into his head.

"Call me Blakey again and you won't see the light of tomorrow." Blake threatened and Richie chuckled.

"I'm ok with that, Blakey." Richie short finger guns at him and Blake scoffed.

"Well, who's gonna come then?" Bev asked.

"What makes you think you're going?" Greta raised her eyebrows.

"Well, I did come up with the idea but I guess I was naive." Bev rolled her eyes.

"Right, me, Bev, Eds-

"Eddie."

"Eds, Ben, Chloe and Stanalan the manalan." Richie finished, pointing at each of them. "Oh and Bill."

"M-m-m-me? Wh-wh-w-why me?" Bill groaned.

"Because watching you frolicking over the place gives us all great enjoyment." Stan elbowed him playfully.

"What makes you think you have the decision in-

"Greta no one gives two shits, ok? Right, let's go." Chloe got up and brushed her trousers down, hauling Bill up beside her.

"You know, we probably should've used words in a hat to decide who was going." Bev said once they were out of the room, treading their way to west and south's common room.

"Eh, with only three minutes that would've taken up too much of our time." Richie replied confidently.

"W-why are w-w-we s-s-sp-s-spying again?" Bill asked after a while.

"Trying to find out how much they've really planned for their show." Eddie answered, a look of determination on his face Richie admired so much.

"Probably be something like Little Shop of Horrors." Stan snorted.

"Yeah, then they'll like cut out some green card and move some paper about as if it's the plants arms." Ben continued, making them all laugh.

"Oh Seymour! Save me Seymour!" Richie squealed in a high pitched voice and jumped into Eddie's arms and he wobbled under the weight.

"Jesus Christ, Rich. Do I look like Mike Hanlon to you?" Eddie exclaimed, almost toppling down the stairs.

"Oh Seymour, I've always know you've had a soft spot for me!" Richie continued in his high pitched voice.

"Yeah well you won't be landing on one let me tell you." Eddie strained.

"I love yo- AH SHIT!" Eddie let go of Richie and he went sliding down the stairs, hitting every one of them. "Shit Eds, thought you were stronger than that." He rubbed his elbows.

"I am, just couldn't be bothered to carry you any longer." Eddie shrugged.

"That or he wasn't able to, he was going red under the pressure!" Bev said, eyeing Richie particularly weirdly for his liking.

"Shh, guys!" Chloe whisper yelled.

"What? What's up?" Ben asked, looking at her in concern.

"Nothing. You guys were going on and on and I just wanna spy to be honest." She said and started to walk up the last flight of stairs they had to climb in order to get to the common room.

"You'd think they'd personalise south and west tower at least a little bit differently to north and East's, wouldn't you?" Ben said quietly as they all walked delicately up the stairs. Well almost all of them. Richie and Bill were seeing who could skip the most stairs at a time in one step. The highest anyone could go was six steps and that's with Bill basically doing the splits.

"Th-th-th-think they'd h-h-h-huh-have the m-money f-for that? I haven't see one w-working glue s-s-stick since the f-f-first week of last year." Bill shook his head, stretching his legs to see if he could skip seven. He could not.

"Well I mean he's not wrong." Stan whispered.

They all crept up just below the window of the door and all squished together to peek in.

"Looks a lot like brainstorming to me." Bev whispered so quietly Richie didn't know whether she'd actually spoke or just breathed what he was thinking.

Richie placed his hand on the door handle.

"Richie," Stan stared at his hand in alarm. "The fuck are you doing?"

"Shh, have trust in The Tozier." Richie smiled up at him lazily.

"I'm not gonna trust anybody who refers to themselves as The Tozier!" Stan whisper yelled.

"Shh!" Eddie hissed.

Richie slowly twisted the door handle, despite Stan's and mostly everybody else's manic complaints. He opened the door a crack and could just about get a hint of what they were saying.

"Bev's face when I pulled her hair though." Richie could only guess was Harriet's voice, followed by an obnoxious laugh. He looked at Bev who had her lips pursed together, showing little emotion.

"And then when- wait, was the door always open?" Another voice floated in.

"Shit!" Bill mouthed.

"What do we do?" Chloe asked, barely speaking.

Ben looked around hurriedly.

"Probably spies. Who knows?" James' voice seemed to be getting closer.

Richie's stomach dropped.

"Guys quickly, this way!" Ben scrambled up from his knees, taking a step then almost tripping over again. "Shit Richie! Why is your leg stretching three meters outwards?"

"It's comfortable! You know, you should definitely try it-"

"Shut up and run!" Stan dragged Richie into a crouch and they all legged it round a close by corner.

"F-f-fuck me!" Bill exclaimed almost silently, rubbing the back of his head from when he'd hit it on the wall.

"Isn't Bev doing that enough?" Richie pointed out.

"See that window?" Bev hissed violently.

"Happily." Stan said quickly. They all looked at him.

"What?" They said in unison.

"You were referring to jumping out of the window, correct?" Stan

asked.

“Yeah?” Bev scrunched her eyebrows together.

“Well then.” Stan stated. They all blinked. “Guys I’m kidding.”

“Nope no one out here! Guess we can keep talking about the plans for our show in peace!” James’ voice echoed loudly in the corridor.

“Fuck they know.” Eddie said after James had shut the door.

“Nah, they can’t have. Not with my and Bill’s ninja skills.” Richie kicked a leg in the air.

“Fuck they definitely know.” Chloe sighed.

“It’s fine, not all hope is lost yet.” Ben reassured. “But first we need a way to get out of here before we get caught again.”

“We didn’t exactly get caught,” Bev reviewed. “Just tested us. I say we did pretty well.”

“Yeah, apart from the part of Bill getting brain damage.” Eddie chuckled.

Bill crossed his eyes. “What’s a shoe?” He impersonated, making them all laugh lightly.

“Nah he’s completely fine.” Bev laughed.

“Let’s take this as a trial run. In the real thing, we shall pull through.” Ben said confidently.

“Don’t.” Eddie said quickly.

“What, I didn’t even say anything!” Richie held his hands up in defence.

“You were thinking it.”

“Yeah I was”

Beverly Marsh, Common Room

“Welcome, all, to the second episode of Play Planning.” Bev announced as all of them gathered in a large circle in the middle of the room on the floor. They’d pushed a few bits of furniture around before Ben decided it was big enough. It was still too small but hey, cosier the better, right?

“You sound like a yoga guru.” Eddie giggled.

“Also known as our geography teacher.” Audra grinned.

“And did you seriously call these meetings episodes?” Greta scorned.

“Jesus, I say one thing and I get attacked.” Bev held up her hands in defence. “Might as well burn me for witch craft while you’re at it.”

“Well the hair could’ve fooled me not gonna lie.” Richie shrugged lazily. Bev flipped him off easily.

“Ok so. We’ve figured out what play we’re gonna do,” Chloe pulled the meeting back on course. “But now we need to figure out how we’re gonna do it.”

“Oh! Well I was thinking, since we have like a load of stage lights, we could change their colours for when it’s that dancing scene when Sandy and Danny dance and this new bitch comes along and then we could swivel them so it looks like a disco and-“ Richie rattled off at a thousand miles per hour.

“Good idea but maybe we should start at the beginning-“ Mike was cut off rapidly by Richie.

“And then for the last scene we can like order a slide off a website and drag it onto a stage and then get a ladder and stick a couple of chairs to it and get a card board cut out of a Ferris wheel and then we have a Ferris wheel and the flying car! For the flying car we could get some bungee strings and tie them to the lights so they hang down and people can hold a-“

“Richie!” Stan hushed him, finally getting a word in edge ways.

“Yeah?”

“None of that’s gonna happen.” Stan said flatly.

“You don’t know that!” Richie retorted.

“Well there is a part where health and safety come into this.” Mike reasoned begrudgingly.

“Screw health and safety!” Richie almost yelled.

“I d-d-d-duh-d-don’t th-th-think it’s a-a bad i-i-idea.” Bill shrugged.

“See!” Richie gestured to Bill. “Bill thinks it’s a good idea.”

“Yes but Bill would, wouldn’t he.” Stan brushed back some of his flailing hair with his hand.

“Guys.” Bev said meekly in an attempt to shut them up.

“H-hey what’s th-th-that supposed t-tuh-t-to mean?” Bill frowned.

“It means that-“

“Guys!” Bev shouted over them, making them all jump and turn to her. “Quit arguing. Richie, they’re all good ideas and we could probably work some of them. Especially the disco scene an-“

“Uh, guys?” Blake almost raised his hand, quickly realised what he was doing and threw it back down again, shaking his head at himself.

“What?” Half of them looked at him, exasperated.

“I didn’t know when would be a good time to tell you I’ve never seen Grease before so I figured I’d just do it now.” Blake said quietly, almost shyly. Which was completely and utterly unlike him.

“You what?” Eric looked at him wildly.

“For God’s sake Blake, you always ruin everything.” Greta rolled her eyes.

Everybody just looked at her, Buffy slowly shaking her head in

annoyance, looking as if she was scared to open her mouth incase something she'd regret came out of it.

"I know a way we can solve that." Eddie pointed out.

"And what way would that be?" Richie asked.

"I'm pretty sure I saw the cassette tape at the library last term, I doubt they would've moved it." Eddie said.

"How do you remember that but not remember where you put your geography book?" Ben asked, laughter sitting on his voice.

"I remember things that interest me." Eddie replied simply.

"That why you forgot my birthday?" Eric teased.

"Gonna be honest, I don't think I ever knew in the first place."

All of them, yes, north and east tower, made their way down stairs and to the library. Bev had never minded libraries, she could settle in one if she needed to, but she felt if she stayed in that one place for too long she'd lose her mind. It was all too... quiet. Bev's ideal past time would be, well, obviously being with the losers but before Whitmore, before all that came into the life, she'd just hang around outside somewhere. Anywhere her body would take her.

Now you could argue that all those places were quiet, but they were a different type of quiet. In a library you were forced to be quiet. Not having a choice to just scream until your lungs caved in, whereas outside you have that freedom. If you screamed, no one would be there to ban you from outside. If you screamed, the birds would listen and reply in their usual happy song tune and you would embrace it. Freedom was what Bev often craved. Freedom.

They wandered in and Eddie immediately went to the stacked cassettes that were meant to be on a shelf but were too many of them.

"Gee he really does remember." Buffy huffed a small laugh.

"Memory of an elephant." Ben added.

“Big difference of proportion to his body.” Mike chuckled.

“Not for his ass.” Richie smirked quietly and Bev thwacked him on the arm, beaming to her hearts content.

“What were you saying about my ass?” Eddie returned a few moments later, confidently holding the Grease cassette case in his hand.

“I- well- it- I was just uh- I was saying how it was like an elephants memory.” Richie spluttered, quickly taking his glasses off to wipe them clean.

“Jerk.” Eddie eyed him dangerously, but if you looked close enough you’d see the faintest of faint glint of a grin on his face, so subtle that you’d be fooled into thinking Eddie was about slap the shit out of Richie. Richie seemed to notice this and just barely grinned back.

“Where are we supposed to watch this then?” Blake asked as they headed out the library.

“The common room, dumbass.” Greta replied.

“Well the question I meant to ask is; is there a projector in there? And cassette player?” Blake corrected.

“Why didn’t you just ask that question in the first place?”

“Jesus guys can you shut up? Weren’t you, like, snogging each other’s faces off last term?” Bev brought up. Greta turned beetroot red and Blake paled, Emily even gasped.

“You didn’t know?” Patty asked her and Emily shook her head.

“I’m just gonna give you a constant summary of each day to you from now on.” Buffy shook her head, laughing lightly. Emily also chuckling.

“Right, l-l-luh-let’s g-go.” Bill said and led them all up the stairs, Mike following him closely.

Bev knew she needed freedom like some chips need a pinch of salt,

they just work together. But other times, the chips get too salty and they just want to be free of it. That's how Bev felt with the losers. Just needed a little bit of both, and for Bev, she just needed six pinches of salt and she'd be happy until God knows when.

Stan Uris, once again in the Common Room

"Kill me now." said, flopping down on the sofa.

"No chance." Alison said, moving Eric's legs so she could sit down. "We need you for our next lacrosse match. Which reminds me, when are tryouts?"

"Friday lunch time." Chloe said from the book shelf in the corner of the common room. "We might miss some of French."

"Yes!" Mike said from Stan's side, punching the air and almost taking Stan's eye out.

"I'd prefer to keep my vision, thank you." Stan said, dodging Mike's fist.

"Don't think you'd look good with glasses like mine?" Richie said from the sofa in front of Stan, turning his head.

"No."

"So rude, Stan." Richie said, turning back around.

North and East had just finished their last lesson of the day and had all retreated to their common room. Many of them were exhausted, having had P.E fourth and a very tiresome Geography lesson last. And the second year common room, although it still seemed a bit foreign, was more than ideal. Someone, probably Matron, had lit the log fire and all six sofas were occupied from around the whole room. Bill, Ben, Eddie and Richie were all sat on their own sofa opposite the fire, Bill and Ben attempting to link the daisy chains they'd made in P.E and Eddie and Richie were leaned in together, going over the script book for Grease the two of them had found in the Library.

Bev was sitting on the sofa at the far right of the common room,

isolated from everything else. Half of East seemed to be with her, and they were all talking in low voices.

“Bill is so out of his depth.” Mike whispered to Stan.

“What?” Stan said, his eyes moving from Bev to Bill.

“Am I the only one who has any logic when it comes to dating?” Mike said. “Bev is playing hard to get.”

“But Bill is already dating Bev.” Stan said, completely bewildered.

“It’s something girls do.” Mike said, like it was obvious. “She’s sending the signs.”

“She’s not some exotic tiger.” Stan said.

Mike raised his eyebrows and sighed. “Okay, so you know if someone did something to piss you off and didn’t apologise, you’d ignore them or something, right?”

“Yeah...” Stan said, not knowing where Mike was going with this.

“Well, what Bev is doing is sort of the same.” Mike continued, like he was on a nature documentary. “She’s acting all distant and know it all to make Bill feel intimidated.”

“Yeah but why?” Stan said, still not understanding.

“Because it reminds him who’s in control?” Mike said. “I’m not too sure, really. But girls, man. Girls.”

“Girls.” Stan nodded, who hadn’t had a crush on a single girl in his entire life.

Mike did a huge sigh, like girls were the most complicated thing to ever exist, and patted Stan on the back.

Bev, who must of noticed Stan and Mike talking, slipped off the sofa and headed over to them.

“Hiya boys.” She said, dragging out the ‘Hi’. “What are you fellas

talking about?”

“Exotic tigers.” Mike said.

“About how you’re trying to play hard to get so Bill will feel intimidated despite already being a couple.” Stan said.

Bev raised her eyebrows before laughing, showing her dimples. “Seriously?”

“I’m going to take a random guess and say that was not your intention at all.” Stan said.

“I didn’t realise you two were such experts on the female species.” Bev said.

“So you weren’t flirting with Bill in History?” Mike interrogated.

“Maybe.” Bev said, shrugging as Bill and Ben turned around on the sofa.

“E-e-everything oh-okay?” Bill said.

“I don’t know, can you talk to me?” Bev teased.

“Yeah, or is she too intimidating?” Stan said, smiling.

Bill looked between the two, a look of confusion on his face.

“I don’t think Bev’s intimidating.” Ben said as Bev and Stan fought back laughter. “She’s just a bit scary when she gets angry.”

“Aw, my heart.” Bev said, pressing a heart to her chest.

“W-w-wait, w-why w-w-would I be i-i-intimidated by B-b-b-b-bev again?” Bill said.

“History, remember?” Mike said. “You were failing terribly at flirting.”

“It sounds like your talking about a tiger or something.” Ben said, his arms on the back of the sofa. “Love isn’t that complicated.”

“And how would you know.” Richie said, joining the conversation. “A secret summer hookup?”

“Mm, like you’d know about that.” Eddie retorted, to which Richie let out a strangled laugh.

“Well, if you really wanted to show your appreciation for someone, why can’t you just give them a hard boiled egg as a gift or something?” Ben said.

“A hard boiled-“ Stan began.

“Oh Benny, if only the rest of us thought like you.” Richie said, leaning over Eddie and Bill to pat Ben’s arm.

“Why are we talking about this anyway?” Bev said, perching on the highest part of the sofa. “Haven’t we got more important things to talk about?”

Stan thought that, for the Losers, ‘very important’ normally just meant very insane, dangerous or something that didn’t, and would never, make sense. But at that point in time, there was actually one thing that didn’t tick those boxes.

“The play.” Stan said. “Anyone got any ideas? Apart from Richie.”

“Wha-“ Richie started but before he got any further, Eddie cut through.

“I think we should try to spy again.” He said, not meeting anyone’s eye.

“You do?” Mike said.

“Yeah.” Eddie said, fiddling with her hands. “I just really don’t want a repeat of last year.”

Stan felt a sinking feeling in his stomach as he looked at Eddie’s nervous figure. All the Losers knew how hard and unfair it had been on Eddie, of course, but the worst thing was none of them could ever truly understand; Eddie had to go through it alone. There was no one he could go to, no one who’d faced the same problems. In fact, Stan

thought that there was hardly any celebrities in the world who were out as gay, and he could understand why. The world treated different people like shit. So for Eddie to have been outed, to be the only openly gay person at Whitmore, must of been one of the hardest things he could of gone through. But Stan knew how strong Eddie Kaspbrak was, and Stan thought that if he was ever in the same situation, he wouldn't have been as brave as Eddie.

"I agree." Ben said, nodding slowly. "We should try again."

"But isn't it Luke who should be our target?" Mike said.

"Yes." Eddie said fairly. "But also no. West and South are the ones who heard what I said in the first place and we can't forget that they're the ones who started the prank wars."

"Should we go now?" Richie asked.

"It would be too obvious." Eddie shook his head. "We already tried once today."

"And Richie knows how well that went." Mike laughed.

"S-s-so w-what about t-t-tomorrow?" Bill said. "Don't w-we have a l-l-lesson or t-two with t-t-them?"

"He's right." Bev said. "We have English"

"I l-l-love it w-w-when you s-say that." Bill said.

"What, we have English?" Ben said. "No offence but I always thought you hated English."

"You didn't-". Mike said, looking utterly done with everything.

"Yeah, I bet he likes it." Stan said, grinning. "Intimidates us."

They laughed as Bill reached up and awkwardly knocked Stan's arm.

"Ss-s-shut u-up!"

Notes for the Chapter:

gay

5. Act Two, Scene One; The things we didn't expect

Notes for the Chapter:

soooo muchhhh happenssss

Beverly Marsh, Math Class

It was a cool Friday morning with a bitter feel in the September trees, and the Loser's plan to go back and spy on West and South still hadn't happened. Bev thought it was because of how time consuming the first weeks back were. They had a new timetable, new teachers, new books. It was quite a big fucking mess, if she was honest. But hey ho, it was Friday of week 2, their last week of their timetables, and after this there were two completely empty days for her to sleep.

Unless they were allowed to go into town on the Sunday. Within the new lessons and all the play planning, Bev had completely forgotten about the town. Mrs Wilson normally let them go every other Sunday, sometimes every Sunday if they'd been particularly good. But going into town was always a laugh, even if Bev herself didn't have money; her parents certainly didn't give her pocket money.

But she definitely wasn't going to think of them for a moment longer than she needed to. So many things were happening at Whitmore and Bev was at the very centre of them, even if some things (Like Henry Bowers somehow making it into Whitmore) weren't good. There was no reason to let her mind wonder to the two people she hated and loved.

"So, to inverse the equation to find X, we must divide by both sides if it's a times, understand?" Mr Santolina, their new Math Teacher, asked.

Bev lifted her head out of her hand slowly, scanning the board.

Shit.

"You understand this?" She asked Blake, who was sitting next to her.

"Yeah, I guess." Blake said. "He explained it well enough anyway."

“Ah.” Bev said, who’d totally blanked out half the lesson by mistake.

She read over the board, which consisted of a large equation written in chalk. She couldn’t make heads or tails of it, and made a mental note to ask Stan to explain it to her later. She couldn’t afford to fall behind, something she never thought she would do.

Last year, her grades had been pretty good. Apart from French, they’d all been above average. But for some reason, she was finding it harder and harder to concentrate. In Science, their lesson before Math, she could hardly grasp the chemical reactions. And it wasn’t just that. Almost all the lessons she’d taken since she’d returned, she had been so much slower at understanding. It was like a shift in her brain or something. And she didn’t even know why.

It wasn’t just lessons. She felt different with the Losers. She still loved them, of course, but unlike last year, she found herself constantly dancing on the edge of their conversations. Maybe it was because it was only the second week back or maybe it was something else.

Maybe she had changed over the summer. Maybe all the treatment her parents had given her over the six weeks was starting to show.

Maybe.

“Right, pack up!” Mr Santolina said, clapping his hands as the bell went.

Bev jumped up and hastily put her book and pencil case in her bag, not wanting to stop for a second in case her mind ran away again. She sped walked to the door and waited for the rest of the Losers to join her as the rest of the students left for their twenty minute break between their second and third class.

“Wanna go to the common room?” Stan asked as the last people filled out of the classroom.

“Y-y-yeah, I l-l-left m-my p-p-pencil c-case their.” Bill said.

“Of course you did.” Stan said as the seven headed out the classroom and through the familiar route to their common room.

"What do we have next? Bev asked, clutching the strap of her bag.

"Wildlife class." Eddie said.

"I thought it was woodlife class?" Ben said.

"Oh." Eddie said blankly. "Well, one of those two."

"And what is this class again?" Richie said. "Because I don't recall having it last year."

"Because you didn't." Ben said. "It's only just been introduced recently and Whitmore decided to offer it in the second year."

"And all it is is looking at incests?" Bev asked, laughing slightly.

"All it is?" Mike said, his deep eyes widening. "This will be the best class I have."

"I'll be surprised if Mike isn't engaged to a ladybug by the end of it." Richie said.

"Yeah and I'll be surprised if we make it to the common room without me dying inside." Stan said. "Come on."

They went up the grand staircase, only just in a line, and turned left to their common room.

Bev was in the middle of Bill and Mike and she tried to focus on the movements of her feet instead of what she thought about it Math. But the thing was, it was such an unnerving thought that she couldn't help think of it again. Like a car crash, she couldn't take her mind away. What if she had changed and it did have something to do with her parents. It was only too entirely possible. The switch between home and Whitmore had been like an avalanche, something so fast and unexpected that she could hardly keep up. She had to change from her bubbly, joking self to a careful quiet, Beverly Marsh. But which one was her in the first place? Maybe none of them. Maybe she'd been putting on a character all this time.

"B-b-b-bev?" Bill said, reaching out and squeezing his hand. "Y-you oh-oh-okay?"

“Yeah.” Bev said quickly. “Of course.”

Bill smiled and Bev smiled back but his hand didn't have the normal warmth she was accustomed with and she thought, no she knew it was her fault. The whole thing in History, the thing Mike thought was flirting, was so confusing because she didn't even know what she was doing and it was funny to start with because Patty was laughing along but now she just felt so lost and sick and she didn't want to lose Bill and she didn't even know if she was flirting or being mean and Bill's hand felt like ice in hers.

She just wanted all of it to stop.

They came round the corner that lead directly to North Tower when Beverly caught sight of someone she never wanted to see again.

“Back!” She said quickly, pulling Bill with her.

“Wh-“ Mike said, clumsily retreating with them.

“Henry Bowers.” Bev whispered. “He's right there.”

Eddie's whole face paled. “Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit.” He buried his face in Richie's shoulder, not wanting to look.

“Wu-wu-what's h-he du-du-doing?” Bill asked. He was peering round the wall, looking at where Henry was.

Ben walked over and joined him. “It looks like he's talking to Mrs Oaks.”

“She's the Fifth Year's tutor, right?” Richie said.

“Yeah.” Ben said, still at the wall.

“This doesn't make sense.” Eddie said, pulling his head from Richie's shoulder and looking around at everyone. “No way did Henry Bowers get good enough grades to make it into Whitemore. It just isn't possible.”

“Maybe he got a scholarship.” Mike said evenly.

Bev shook her head, “Why would he want to come here. It’s not like it has knifing classes.”

“He’s really that bad?” Stan asked.

“He really is.” Bev said, remembering how Henry had once grabbed her hair on the way back from school and held a knife to her neck. The only reason she was able to get away was because she kicked him in the balls.

“We have to do something.” Bev said. “We can’t just sit here and listen to him talk like a normal student.”

“Technically he is a normal student.” Stan said grimly. “To the teachers, anyway.”

But Bev was already on her feet. She’d had enough of staying quiet while people in her life treated her like shit. It was about time she did something, if not for herself but for Eddie. Henry was some pussy ass boy who was such a coward he needed to hit other kids to make himself feel better. And Bev was definitely going to make him feel something.

Mrs Oaks had just left and Henry was looking down the corridor. Bev heard feet behind her and knew all of the losers had her back for this.

“Bev, you sure about this?” Eddie whispered, catching up with her. “You know he could totally rip our faces off.”

“Not at Whitemore he cant.” Bev said determinedly.

Henry turned around and caught sight of them. For a few seconds his face was completely blank before he recognised Bev and Eddie, and his face broke out into a haunting grin.

“Well, if it isn’t the slut and wheezy boy.” Henry said, making Bev flinch. His voice was the same smug, death ringing sound it had always been and hundreds of memories threatened to overflow.

“You know, they said you both ran away to England but I didn’t really believe it until you were actually gone.” Henry said, speaking as if it was a pleasant catch up.

“Well you see us now.” Bev said harshly.

“Yep.” Henry said, eyeing the rest of the Losers. “Got yourself some baby friends? Are you banging all of them Marsh? Tut tut, awfully greedy. Or maybe Kaspbrak has his fair share too. We all know what a queer he was.”

“Shut your mouth.” Richie growled as Bill and Mike both moved towards Henry.

“Oh wow, very impressive.” Henry said, as if spectating a tennis event and not talking to two people he use to constantly torment.

“Why are you here?” Eddie said, getting straight to the point.

Henry widened his lifeless eyes in fake shock. “So, so rude.” He said, shaking his head in a sluggish, slow movement. “I’m here, of course, because I’m a student at Whitemore.”

“Since when.” Bev spat.

“Since my father went out of business and we had to move.” Henry said. “He contacted the school and told them how he desperately needed a place to send me and they checked my grades and I was awarded a scholarship. Turns out I’m pretty good at P.e.”

“P.e?” Mike said, his eyes full of hatred.

“Football is my star sport.” Henry said, grinning in a way that made Bev shudder. “Especially my tackle. Want me to demonstrate?”

“I want you to leave.” Stan muttered. Unfortunately, Henry heard it.

“What’s that, girly boy?” He said, face changing like thunder. “Want to repeat that?”

Stan stood still, face completely passive.

“I’ll pull your hair out with my bare hands.” Henry hissed. “That goes for you too, Beverly. Failed last time, maybe it will be second time lucky.”

“We’re not in Derry anymore, fuck face.” Eddie said. “You can’t waltz in here and make our life a misery. There’s rules and teachers, and they actually care this time round.”

“We’ll see how much they care when you’re dead.” Henry said, and shoved Eddie before pushing through the rest of the Losers.

Eddie fell to the ground with a thump and the seven crowded around him.

“Eddie, are you okay?” Ben asked, helping Eddie into a sitting position.

“Fine.” Eddie said, pressing a hand to his head.

“I’m not normally a violent person but I’m filled with the sudden urge to push him down the staircase.” Ben said, looking behind him. But Henry was long gone, probably out to terrorise other second years, and Bev wasn’t sad to see him leave.

“I will push him down the stairs.” Richie said seriously, swinging his arm around Eddie’s waist and helping him up.

“No you won’t.” Eddie said sharply. “None of you are to go anywhere near him, okay? He’s dangerous.”

“You don’t actually think he’ll kill you, do you?” Stan asked.

“All I know is, I’m not risking your lives.” Eddie said, his arm now around Richie’s back too.

“Me either.” Bev said. “You forget, Whitmore is built right on a cliff.”

Ben Hansom, outside Whitmore in Wildlife class

“Richie Tozier, if you don’t take that worm away from my face in the next two seconds-“

Ben turned around and was not surprised to see Richie tormenting Stan with a particularly dirty worm he must of just found.

“Don’t hold it like that!” Mike said, tumbling towards Richie to save the worm.

It was wildlife class, something Ben never thought he’d attend, and their teacher already looked ready to quite her job. It was a whole year class, so West and South were there too. They’d been let out behind the school, where trees and bushes were at their thickness, and all given a small book with watercolored pictures of insects with description. Their task today was to find five.

Richie had already found all the worms and Bill had accidentally sat down on an ants nest so that meant they only had three left. But Ben knew he wasn’t as focused on that as he should be. The conversation Bev and Eddie had had with Henry Bowers was still echoing in his head and it stabbed him every time he thought of what the both of them must of been through. Bev had told him once what Henry use to say about her and Ben had never been more sure that Bev Marsh was the strongest person he’d ever met. Even after everything, after Henry Bowers and her parents, she still kept going. She was like fire in rain. Nothing stopped her forever.

“Lillie, come here!” A girl with golden curls called to a group of South.

That was another thing keeping Ben’s attention; West and South. Now was the perfect opportunity to find out more about that Sandie girl they saw the other day. Maybe it was a small disagreement but maybe it wasn’t. Maybe that girl was truly being bullied, like Bev with Henry Bowers. And Ben didn’t want to watch it happen. He wanted to do something.

“Ben, you good there Buddy?” Mike said, breaking Ben from his thoughts.

“Yeah.” Ben said lightly. “Just thinking.”

“I can tell.” Bev jokes, her voice golden honey despite what happened just half an hour ago.

“Want to share you thoughts?” Eddie said, crouched down with a stick, poking leaves out of the way to try and find insects.

Ben shrugged, "You said you wanted to spy on West and South to find out more about that girl, right?"

"Yeah?" Eddie said, dropping his stick and edging closer.

"Well, won't don't we try now?" Ben said. "We could easily play it off if we were caught."

"I sometimes wonder when our lessons will revolve around doing the actual work." Stan said, his hair tied up to avoid it brushing in the dirt.

"When they stop being assholes." Richie said, coming up behind Ben.

Ben checked Richie's hands for any worms but once he saw the were clear of any potential attacks, he shuffled aside on his knees to let Richie into their make shift circle.

"You both have good points." Eddie said. "We need to figure out what they're doing but we also need to focus on the play itself. We can't lose ourselves in one thing."

"L-l-lose o-o-ourself in w-what?" Bill said, walking over. He'd been sent to Matrons office after sitting on the ants nest in case of bites and he now had a light blue sticker that said 'I've been very brave!' on his shirt.

"Can't lose ourselves in spying on South and West." Bev said, moving over so Bill could sit down.

"Hey do you have anymore of those stickers?" Ben asked.

"N-no." Bill said. "And w-w-why w-would you w-w-want them a-a-anyway?"

Ben shrugged. "They'd go well with my complexion."

"Guys," Mike said before Bill could reply, "let's not get carried away. Do you want to spy or not?"

The majority said yes, and they dropped their books on the grass before advancing towards a large group of South and West near

them.

“Be slick.” Ben said in a hushed voice. “Pretend to be looking for incests.”

“Oooh, I think I’ve found some spaghetti!” Richie said, reaching over to Eddie.

“Shut the fuck up!” Eddie whispered as loudly as he dared.

“Guys.” Bev said, making them stop.

The Losers reaches a distance where they could just about hear them and see what they’re doing.

“No way,” Stan said drying. “It looks like they’re doing the work.”

“It looks like a caterpillar.” Harriet was saying, holding something too small for Ben to properly see in her hands.

“Yeah, that or a very colourful worm.” Thomas joked, jotting something down.

“This is spectacularly boring.” Richie said.

“Beep beep.” Ben, Mike and Stan all said.

The South and West group continued to rack the grass for different insects for a while and Ben was just about to suggest they go back to their work when Sandie came over. Her hair was up in a messy bun and she was smiling as she walked over.

“I think I found a wasp’s nest over by the back entrance!” She was saying cheerfully. “Maybe we could check it out?”

“Yeah or maybe you could do us a massive favour and leave us alone.” Anne said harshly.

Sandie jumped back as if she’d been stung. “I was just suggesting-“ she said weakly.

“We don’t give a shit about what you were saying.” Paula said.

“You’re a waste of space in our towers.”

Sandie blinded a few times, looking upset and uncomfortable.

“Do you want to run along and harass somebody else?” Phillip said.

Sandie opened her mouth, closed it, and ran off. The remaining West and South students laughed harshly and continued with their work.

“The hell?” Bev said, flopping back.

“They’re even assholes to each other.” Richie said.

“We should do something.” Ben said certainly. Just because a few people in West and South were dickheads didn’t mean all of them were. And Ben couldn’t bear to think of Sandie all alone, especially in the second week back.

“What can we do?” Stan said evenly. “I want to help but there isn’t really an easy way to do that.”

“W-w-we could t-t-talk t-to h-h-her.” Bill said as the seven headed back to their original place on the grass.

“You think the rest of North and East will let us?” Mike asked.

“They needn’t know.” Bev said.

“They’re really gonna try the same trick again after last year.” Eddie grumbled, squatting down.

“Yes but we found out about it again.” Richie said, sitting next to him. “We could start our own business.”

“Yeah, the FBI.” Eddie giggled slightly, the shadow on his face disappearing.

The Losers continued to talk and flick through their books but Ben’s eyes kept wandering back to West and South. Hadn’t, once long ago, Ben Hansom been lonely too? Hadn’t he kept his voice to himself because he had no one to share it with?

Hadn't he been Sandie?

Eddie Kaspbrak, in the changing rooms

"You know, you'd think you'd get used to the fact you have to do pe every other day, but you don't!" Eddie groaned, throwing his new pe shirt over his head.

"You'd think you'd get used to Eddie's whining but you don't!" Stan joked, getting a slap off Eddie's shorts.

"But come on, seriously, cycling? First of all there are about one million possibilities of breaking at least one of your bones and secondly since when did Whitemore have enough bikes?" Eddie ranted, seriously considering going to Matron for some shit tasting medicine.

"It's Whitemore, it has everything." Mike replied as if that was an answer in itself.

"I do agree with Eddie a bit more on this one," Ben admitted. "Cycling seems a bit pointless unless you wanna become a professional cyclist or some shit and compete in the London Marathon." He performed a British accent on 'London marathon'.

"You don't cycle in the London marathon." Stan said. "It's the Tour de France."

"Get you being all french-y." Richie laid his fingers gently on the back of his glasses and wiggles them up and down.

"You l-l-l-luh-look like th-th-that girl f-f-fr-from Grease." Bill snorted, pulling up his socks. "Th-that one w-w-with p-puh-pig tails wh-wh-who's in the p-pink l-l-luh-l-l-lay-l-layd-la-l-l"

"Ladies." Mike finished for him, swinging his trousers over a peg.

"Don't know whether that's a good thing or a bad thing to be honest." Richie chuckled.

Pe was their last lesson of the day and Eddie just could not be asked. He never is for Pe but having it last lesson was double the pain and double the temperature. Don't get Eddie wrong, he loves cycling. In fact it's his only way of physically getting away from his mother and somewhat mentally, but in Pe he was sure whoever his Pe teacher was they would pin point everything Eddie has ever done wrong in cycling for his entire life. He was happy just hopping on and randomly switching gears into whatever felt the easiest and cycling wherever his body would take him. He didn't need to know anything else.

"Right." The teacher said once they were outside. "I'm Mr Ryan and I'll be your cycling teacher for this rotation."

"Never seen him before." Ben muttered to Eddie, frown knitted across his face.

"Probably someone they dragged from the street since no one wanted to teach cycling." Eddie remarked, rolling his eyes.

"I would like you all to go down to the shed and get out a bike each." Mr Ryan said, clutching a clip board in his hand.

"Each?" Mike asked in shock.

"Thinking of riding double old chap?" Richie winked at Mike.

"I'm no- I'm not even gonna answer that." Mike patted Richie on the shoulder. "Of course we shall!"

"Mike, just gonna say this now, you're going to regret that in a not too distant future." Stan said.

"Time traveler now are we?" Bev smirked.

"I'm sure Bill would love to ride with Beverly." Richie said curtly.

"I'll r-r-r-ride you o-off a c-cl-c-cliff Richie." Bill said, quickly shutting his mouth after realising what he'd said.

"Not usually into boy toys but I can make arrangements." Richie shrugged.

“Beep beep.” Eddie groaned. Richie smiled at him.

They grabbed a bike each and Richie was already riding wildly as they made their way back.

“Richie, get off your bike this instant! Bill, is you don’t get your back side off the handle bars I will personally sanction you!” Mr Ryan yelled as they all arrived. “Right. First of all you will check the gears of a bike, identify how they work and take note of it.”

“We know how to use a bike sir.” Audra sighed.

“You may but those two don’t.” He pointed at Bill who was now attempting to stand on the seat of the bike, Richie trying to get on Bill’s back at the same time and Mike holding the bike for them.

Once they’d finished all the safety procedures about bikes which Eddie already had known about, they were allowed to actually get on the bikes and ride around the field.

“This isn’t half bad.” Bev rode swiftly.

“Your hair does get mighty wind swept.” Greta tried riding one handed to keep her hair in place before being yelled by sir to keep to hands on the handles.

“Wanna race, Bev?” Mike challenged, riding to Bev’s side.

“Oh you’re on Hanlon.” Bev grinned, beginning to bike faster until she and Mike were in front of all of them.

Eddie stood up while riding to see Mike and Bev continuously swapping positions, laughing hysterically with each other.

Eddie too sped up his pace and over took the rest of east and half north.

“Jesus Christ Eddie you’re good at cycling.” Stan said, a hint of surprise in his voice.

“Not bad huh.” Eddie said, half to himself. Maybe he wasn’t bad at all sports. Maybe it was just his attitude. He continued to ride quickly

and caught up to the pace of Mike and Bev.

“For someone who dislikes Pe in itself, you’re doing a pretty good impression of enjoying this.” Mike puffed as Eddie rode next to him.

“He’s a natural.” Bev laughed lightly. Eddie smiled and stayed quiet. He guessed the reason he could ride so quickly was to get away from his mum from time to time, and he hated it. He hated the fact he had to do that. Had to get away from his mother. If Eddie has just been stronger, maybe he could’ve taken his mother’s wrath like taking one of his fake old pills. But he didn’t want to think about that. Not now. He was with his losers and east and north tower and he had to keep his head space clear, with a play that needs to be performed.

And equally importantly, he was back home.

“So you said you were having a race huh?” Eddie pulled himself from his thoughts.

“Yeah, I’m winning.” Mike said confidently.

“Are not!” Bev screeched with laughter.

“None of you are,” Eddie gleamed. He peddled quickly and shouted over his shoulder; “I am!”

Richie Tozier, common room

It always sort of scared him, Richie’s mind did. He thought that if he were anybody else, he’d avoid Richie Tozier. The stupid one with the massive glasses and the running mouth of which you cant slow to a walk.

It really bewildered him sometimes, how he got six amazing people in his life. Because really, who’d want to be associated with Trashmouth Tozier? Richie thought even if he did ever mature and decide to actually listen and learn in classes, he would never, and he means ever, learn how to keep his mouth shut when he needed to. He wanted to. Boy he wanted to so bad, but his shitty mind would not stop sprinting once an idea jumped at him.

His leg bounced up and down raggedly as Ben brainstormed his ideas to Emily who was busy writing it down in almost calligraphy.

“How is your handwriting so neat?” Buffy asked in surprise. “Mine looks as if I’m hanging out of an airplane while writing.”

Emily shrugged. “I just like art.”

“Oh and then we could like collect some branches from outside and decorate the back screen for a couple scenes.” Ben continued, watching as Emily wrote.

There it was. Another idea. For fucks sake Richie keep your damn mouth shut!

“Rich?” Eddie walked over to the giggling boy. “You ok?”

“Why of course I am spaghetti.” Richie swung his arm around Eddie’s shoulders. He sighed but didn’t retaliate which was... oddly, new.

“You just seemed a bit quiet, that’s all.” Eddie finally spoke up.

“Some would count that as a blessing.” Richie chuckled.

Eddie looked at him, really looked at him. So much that it felt like Eddie could see into his soul. Richie quickly looked away and positioned his glasses over his increasingly heating cheeks.

“You aren’t usually this quiet during these meetings,” Eddie said thoughtfully. “I miss hearing your crazy ideas.” He then said quieter, but Richie fully well heard.

“Well, since you’ve asked,” Richie began to rattle off his, as Eddie called them, Crazy ideas, visualising each step of how to make and do them as he spoke. Eddie stayed quiet during the whole thing, only leaning his head on Richie’s shoulder and nodding every so often to show he was still listening. Richie briefly thought about it and laid a gentle arm on Eddie’s waist and just very slightly stuttered as Eddie snuggled into him.

He noticed Emily look at him and smile as he spoke, then continuously scribbling down in her note book. It was only then that

he'd noticed the room had basically gone silent and he was the only one still giving more and more ideas.

Maybe people actually did tolerate Richie Tozier. Maybe he didn't need to learn how to shut his mouth because if he did, he would not be Richie Tozier. He would be the same old same old child who is boring and doesn't contribute to anything, and that's not what Richie wants to be. That's not what any of them want Richie to be. And he doesn't have to be.

Just as he was half way through of explaining how they could build a car, a knock came on the door.

"W-w-what was th-th-that?" Bill asked, looking around in confusion.

"Somebody knocked on the door." Audra said.

"Well that's weird, Matron never knocks." Eddie sat up and Richie flinched.

"It's not Matron that's for sure." Stan walked to the door wearily, Bev getting up to follow him.

They opened the door and standing within it was Sandie. She was sniffing terribly and had so many streams of tears running down her face that you'd think she just dumped water over her face.

"Sandie? What are you doing here?" Stan asked. "Here to spy I expect."

"Leave her be, Stan." Bev said in a tone of which, if you knew Beverly Marsh, meant 'shut the fuck up...please'.

Bev pulled Sandie and the common room. "What's wrong?"

"They- they hurt me!" Sandie wept.

"How? Who?" Bev questioned.

"South and- and west, they slapped me and called me a pig!" Sandie threw herself dramatically down on the sofa next to Eddie.

Richie sized her up. “Across the face?”

“Yes! Don’t you see?” Her eyes widened slightly as she genuinely asked the question. Richie squinted and frowned, shaking his head.

“Well, you can’t sleep here so you’re gonna have to go ba-“

“Oh but I can!” Sandie cut Buffy off, making Buffy clamp her mouth shut in annoyance.

“How so?” Mike asked doubtfully.

“Well I spoke to Mrs Wilson and...” Sandie paused for dramatic effect.

“And...?” Stan folded his arms.

“And east, it looks like you have a new member!”

Notes for the Chapter:

the official trailer has both of us crying to we ignore
cannon even more

6. Act Two, Scene Two; Feels a lot like sinking

Notes for the Chapter:

Sandie joins East and Henry makes a surprise revelation

Bill Denbrough, early in the Common Room

If Bill was completely honest, he didn't give two flying shits. So what if Sandie was joining east tower? The girls would just have more gossip to chat about and hey, maybe they could get some secrets out of her. Really, it's a win win in Bill's eyes. They get some classified information about south and west's play and in return Sandie doesn't get bullied. Bill didn't understand what was causing so much fuss.

"But what if she causes tension?" Audra asked in a hushed voice as they sat in a tight circle in the common room.

"Tension how?" Bev held out her hands in confusion.

"Like between us. North and East. What if she tries breaking us all up?" Audra practically hissed.

"I really think we are over thinking this." Mike shifted uncomfortably.

"But seriously, don't you think something is a little up with her joining so quickly?" Alison asked doubtfully, ignoring Mike's comment.

"I would want to move if someone was bullying me like how south treated her!" Eddie said defiantly.

"It just all seems too..." Stan trailed off, eyebrows knitted in thought.

"...t-t-too?" Bill urged him to continue.

"I don't know just too.. too scripted?" Stan said.

"Sorry but I don't think you can fake tears like that." Ben said in a

matter-of-factly tone.

“Who knows what she’s capable of.” Richie said, surprisingly seriously.

“Well, I think we should be nice to her. She’s been through enough and it’s only, like, the second week.” Bev said.

“Yeah but she’s been here I’m pretty sure the same time as we have, so why is she only being bullied now?” Patty asked.

“She might’ve been before, we have no way of knowing.” Buffy pointed out.

“Well we do, if we are nice to her and welcome her.” Mike said quietly. Bill knew he didn’t like this. Just about everyone who knew Mike Hanlon knew that he was hating this. The taking sides. Don’t get Bill wrong, he knew of Mike’s strength and how he’d deal with just about everyone if they were insulting his friends, but he had a heart made of gold. He didn’t have it in him to take sides unless it was an unbelievably stupid argument, or it was the obvious like the Losers against the shit head Henry Bowers. Which was exactly why you couldn’t hate Mike. You just couldn’t. He wouldn’t hurt a fly unless it would save someone else’s life and not his. He puts everybody before himself, even animals.

Bill admired Mike Hanlon.

“Exactly.” Bev said.

“And we’d be able to get some insight of south and west’s play.” Ben added.

“I don’t think we should allow her.” Buffy crossed her arms stubbornly.

“You don’t ever want to do anything!” Greta snapped.

“How’s that got to do with anything?” Buffy raised her voice.

“Quite a lot actually!” Greta placed her hands on her hips.

“Greta what are you piping up for?” Blake asked her.

“Oh don’t you get ass-y with me!” Greta’s eyes flashed dangerously at Blake.

“What did Blake do?” Eric asked.

“Why are we even talking about this?” Eddie pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Yeah, this has nothing to do with Sandie. Greta, yet again, is making herself the victim and talking about herself!” Richie almost laughed.

“How am I talking about myself?” Greta was practically screeching now.

“Guys,” Mike sighed.

“I’m talking about how Buffy is a lazy piece of shit!” Greta said, exasperated.

“The fuck did you just call me?” Buffy stood up and faced Greta.

“Oh? You didn’t hear me? Too lazy to listen I suspect.” Greta witted.

“If you don’t shut your god damned mouth I will single handedly break it!” Buffy said quietly, cold as ice. Bill’s eyes widened.

“I’d like to see you try get your hands on me-“

“Guys! Stop it!” Emily stood up, stomped her foot and screamed, shocking everybody in the room. Everyone turned silent, Bill even forgetting he had to breathe at some point. Again, he didn’t see the problem in Sandie joining, in fact he kind of felt bad for her.

“Thanks Em,” Mike smiled warmly at her and she nodded, sitting back down and bringing Buffy with her. “Look, like I said, we are seriously over thinking this. Sandie has done nothing wrong to any of us so I don’t understand the hesitance of some of you. We will probably need an extra person for the play anyway and she will no doubt be a big help. So I say we give her the benefit of the doubt because we don’t even know her!

"If you don't like her after about a week of her being here then hate her all you want! Be my guest! But she will be a real big help so why don't you all grow up a little and just give a little bit of trust!" Mike finished, almost about for breath.

Stan swallowed and Bill blinked.

"Mike's right." Beverly sighed. "Like Audra said, she's bringing tension but that's not her fault. It's ours. Let's just welcome her and see where it goes from there."

"Fine. Have it your way, Beaverly." And with that, Greta got up and left.

"Well she's got a stick up her ass today." Chloe said once she'd left.

"Tell me about it." Buffy rolled her eyes.

"So Eds, had any good chucks lately?" Richie broke the silence, wiggling his eyebrows at Eddie.

"Don't call me that."

And just like that, the two towers were back to normal, laughing and chatting away as if there weren't a care in the world. Which there wasn't, not really. They just had to take what would come in their stride and Bill knew that whatever would happen he'd be fine, they'd all be fine, because they had each other.

Especially the Losers Club.

Richie Tozier, in the Common Room at first break

"Guys we really need to start thinking of actual scenes." Chloe sighed, cutting off the rambling of how Richie would suit the role of Jan perfectly.

"But don't you think?" Audra giggled. "He has the glasses and everything."

“I think I’d play a better Danny Zuko.” Richie smirked and leaned across Eddie to Stan. “Hey,” he pulled one of his southern accents that apparently didn’t sound southern at all. Richie didn’t think it was too bad. “How you doin’?”

Stan flicked his forehead and Richie jolted back up, rubbing the flicked part of which now throbbed.

“This is exactly why Richie will not play Danny Zuko.” Stan gestured towards Richie.

“No one will be playing Danny Zuko if we don’t get these scenes sorted out.” Chloe mentioned once again.

“What’s this, our fourth meeting? All we’ve decided is a few props!” Eddie agreed.

“Right. Where to start. Well, you know that beach scene at the movie? We could do that but only the vital bits like where Sandy and Danny are like ‘is this the end?’.” Ben suggested.

“Yeah and then we should do the beginning scene of the Thunderbirds being introduced and Danny could come round the corner and and and then! And then they could be like ‘oh I saw Eugene let’s give him some fun’ and walk off the stage the same time as Sandy- WAIT I forgot about the pink ladies part!” Richie thought for a moment, his whole mind vibrating with the sudden ideas that came rushing to him to be first in line for him to speak of first.

Richie didn’t think his brain was too far off a chain reaction. Once one idea came, he couldn’t stop the next ones from coming in. Which would be fine if they came one at a time for him to actually think over but they didn’t. They rattled off like a never ending machine gun until he was physically stopped.

“Yeah so the pink ladies part could then come after the Thunderbirds and they could come on the opposite end the TB came off, then have their little scene, and then they come off and it’s the same for Sandy and Frenchie.” Richie finished, surprised at how he was so out of breath from just speaking.

"I understood less than a third of that." Patty said blindly.

"Jesus Christ. If ya think this wee lassie if gonna repeat that again then you can get on ya bike!" Richie said, barely able to identify which Voice he was doing himself.

"It's alright, I speak Richard, i'll write it down." Bev laughed and Emily handed her notebook to her.

The rest of the meeting was mostly that. Nearly all the scenes had been picked out and written down bar a few that they literally couldn't do, such as the flying car scene (much to Richie's disappointment).

"Th-th-there is w-wuh-one p-problem though." Bill said.

"What?" Mike looked at him.

"W-wh-What if there a-aren't enough p-people f-f-f-fuh-for all the c-c-c-chara-c-char-c-"

"Characters?" Audra finished.

"Yeah." Bill nodded.

"We will." Bev said certainly. "Besides, we have Sandie as well."

"B-b-b-But what if n-n-n-none of this a-actually works?" Bill still sounded doubtful.

"Where is all this doubt comin' from ya idle wizzer!" Richie asked.

"What the fuck is an idle wizzer?" Stan quizzed.

"Dunno. Heard someone say it in town a while ago." Richie shrugged.

"It means prostitute. Cumbrian slang." Eric said gravely.

Richie blinked.

"Oh."

"Um, well, moving on." Eddie laughed nervously.

“Where were we?” Ben asked. “Ah yes, Bill are you ok?”

“Y-y-Yeah it’s j-just, wh-w-what if s-suh-south and west’s pl-p-play is b-better than ow-ours?” Bill replied.

“It’s not.” A voice came from the door way. Richie swung his head around so fast he thought he got whiplash.

“Sandie? What are you doing here?” Mike looked puzzled.

“Thought I’d swing by, and don’t worry Bill, their play is already far worst than yours.” Sandie smiled surely.

“How do you know? You haven’t heard anything about it?” Buffy challenged, getting a gentle hand on her shoulder from Emily.

Sandie seemed to falter for a second. “I can just feel it.”

“Be feeling something else in a minute.” Buffy said under her breath. Though it sounded joking, Bev still smacked her arm, shaking her head in annoyance.

“Well. Care to share how they’re doing, darling?” Richie smiled, looking back to the losers and winking a wink so subtle that he knew only the losers would depict it.

Sandie flushed and came and sat right next to Richie. To top it all off, Richie gave her a big ol’ wink that almost set her off her perch.

“Why of course but, since I will be in your half in a matter of days, how about you tell me about yours?” She grinned, touching Richie’s pinky finger slightly. He looked at it and shifted, surprised at how easily Sandie just went for him. Richie looked up and caught Stan’s eye.

Stan snorted.

Bev looked around and shrugged. “Why not?”

Stan Uris, sitting in the hall

“They should honestly just suspend lessons and put assemblies onto our timetable.” Mike said as he sat down next to Stan.

“We’ve had, like, three already.” Eddie agreed from Mike’s left.

It was Monday, and after two blissful days of pure nothing, classes were back on track. Apart from period three which was yet another assembly.

This time, however, it was the whole school instead of just the second years. As a consequence to this, the hall was much stuffier and Stan thanked whatever God was out there that he wouldn’t have to walk to the front (pushing his way through chairs wasn’t exactly his idea of fun). The reasoning of this assembly, which they had been told at breakfast, was so the boys and girls who wanted to be head student could say their speeches and promise you lies and get a clap and then on Friday everyone would vote.

It seemed like a waste of time but the missed Crafts Class which sounded even more boring, so Stan just sighed and kept his mouth shut.

Eventually, the whole school had filled in and just as it was getting to an unbearable heat, Mrs Wilson stepped forward and quieten everyone simply with her presence.

“Hello students.” She said, her voice booming around the hall. “As you are all aware, we are a few moments away from listening to six top formers who would like be head student.”

“She’s mu-mu-making it ss-s-sound like t-the m-m-moon landing.” Bill whispered to Stan.

“Now, before we begin can I please ask that everyone is respectful to the competing students.” Mrs Wilson continued. “It takes a lot of courage to stand up here and talk to the whole school. Second, may I ask that your vote isn’t biased based on Towers. As I’ve stressed before, we are all equal here. Now, starting us off is Andy Hungary.”

The hall clapped as Mrs Wilson stepped back and a tall fifth former stepped forward. He had dark hair and the starts of a beard.

"When I came to Whitmore five years ago, never would I of guessed it could have changed my life the way it has." Andy said, but Stan was already blanking out. His legs ached and his back was hot and he really wanted a drink of ice cold water.

Even the thought of this made his tongue and throat feel like sandpaper and he wished he had taken his bag with him to this assembly; he hadn't, however. It was dumped under the table in Crafts class.

"Mike?" He whispered.

"Huh?" Mike said, snapping out of a daydream that would have probably carried him through the whole ordeal.

"Do you have water on you?" Stan asked as David droned on about 'The changes people go through'.

"No." Mike said, pulling a face. "Sorry, buddy."

Stan waved his apology off and scanned the floor in front of him. Bev, he noted, had her bag at her feet and leaning uncomfortably over Bill, he picked it up. Inside was her normal water bottle and he unscrewed the cap just as David finished.

"Thank you for that!" Mrs Wilson said as the hall clapped. Stan took a drink.

"Now can we please welcome Henry Bowers onto the stage!"

Stan choked. Quite literally choked. He started hacking, doubling over. At first, his distress was covered by claps but they soon died down and his coughing was abominably noticeable. In fact, they sounded like the loudest coughs he'd ever had in his life, even louder than the ones he had when he was doing a backstroke and accidentally swallowed the pool water.

"Stanly Uris, are you quite all right?" Mrs Wilson said from the side, sound concerned.

Mike broke out of his shocked haze and wacked Stan on the back. He almost fell out of his chair, but Stan managed to stop choking.

“Fine.” He croaked.

Mrs Wilson gave a nod and Henry Bowers stepped up. Stan felt his breath catch again. Henry Bowers? Henry Bowers, the person who’d threatened to rip his hair out a few days ago, was running for head boy?

He scanned the losers and saw the same shock horror on each of their faces. Ben was leaned forward, his eyes wide. Bev was gripping her seat, face frozen in horror and Eddie kept repeating “please no, please no please no.” in a small voice under his breath.

Henry walked to the center stage and for a moment he stared directly at Stan. Stan reeled back, his body turning ice cold. It felt, almost, as if Henry had seen right inside him. He flinched and within a second, Henry’s gaze dropped.

‘He’ll be really bad.’ Stan thought desperately. ‘A guy like him can’t wear a mask for long. He’ll mess up his speech or something and people will see his true colours and he won’t get picked and everything will be fine.’

“Thank you, Mrs Wilson.” Henry said, his voice full of fake warmth. “Now, I am new here but that doesn’t stop me from wanting to play my part right. Whitmore is an absolutely wonderful school and, hopefully, I can help aid it’s growth.”

“It can’t be.” Bev said slowly. “He’s talking actual English.”

“Why would he ever want to be head?” Ben asked in a low voice.

“So he can take control.” Eddie said simply, his face pale as he watched Henry’s act. “So he can continue to make our lives hell without any consequences.”

Stan moved his gaze back to Henry. He was talking loudly with exaggerated movements but behind it all, Stan still saw the Henry that had threatened to kill Eddie.

Except the rest of the school didn’t.

The rest of the school, in fact, seemed to be eating up Henry’s speech.

He was going on about responsibilities and being everyone's friend and adding in small jokes to which he'd robotically laugh at. To anyone who'd just walked in, he'd seem like a completely normal fifth former.

Which was the exact problem.

"If he gets in, he'll easily be able to make our lives living hell." Stan whispered to the losers.

"P-pretty b-big i-i-if." Bill said.

"He's better than the first guy." Ben said. "What's to stop him?"

"We have to tell someone!" Richie said. "He can't just treat E- you guys like that! It's just-"

"Rich, I tried in Derry." Eddie said in a matter of fact voice. "Nothing happened."

"Yeah but Whitemore isn't Derry." Mike said openly. "Isn't it worth a shot?"

"Isn't it?" Eddie said, his voice rising. "What if it goes wrong? What if he somehow finds out? You see this?" He pulled the top of his sleeve up, revealing a long, thin scar that circled around his arm, "He did that to me barely two years ago. I don't want that happening again."

"Jesus, Eds." Richie said, brushing his thumb gently over it. Eddie tugged his sleeve down at lightning speed.

"If he's done that to you once, we can't just let him do it again." Stan said logically. To him, no matter how scary one was, you couldn't let them push you around. And Stan had a stupid amount of trust for Whitemore and a stupid amount of trust in Mrs Wilson. He saw the same warmth in her that he saw in his own Mum and he felt confident that she wouldn't let anything, like Henry Bowers becoming head boy, happen. They just had to be open to her about it.

"I don't know." Bev said in a quiet voice, speaking for the first time in a while. "I agree that Whitemore is a different place but Henry has a way of manipulating people. You saw what he was doing up there."

“But Mrs Wilson-“ Ben began, but Bev interrupted him.

“She might fall for it too.”

The seven of them looked uneasily at each other for a moment. The thought of Henry Bowers having so much power not only over them but the whole school was something none of them had expected on that Monday, waking up like normal in their dorms. But, Stan thought bitterly, life is always full of surprises.

“Next we have Aliya Caavemon!” Mrs Wilson called. The hall broke into clapping again and Stan realised, with some numb shock, that they’d missed two other competitors.

The last person running had large, curly hair and hazel eyes. She was wearing a gold chain that complemented her dark skin and she smiled as she stepped up, showing perfectly white teeth.

“Now I’m not going to bore you with the normal type of speeches,” She said in a jokey voice, and a few people laughed, “but I am obviously going to be explaining what I would do if I became head girl.

“First of all, I want every single student here to feel like they can come up and talk to me at any time. I know how lost you can feel at times and how big Whitemore is but I’m always on your side.

“Second, I want to help guide this school along with your wished and hopes. As I mentioned, any ideas you have for this school, please tell me and I assure you I will look into it.

“Third of all, I want to push clubs forward a bit more. We already have hundreds of clubs here but I want to add an competitive edge to them. For example, if I become head girl, I’ll enter in certain sports groups for the national competitions, make sure theatre and band get opportunities to play, etc.

“I don’t want to take up any of your time,” She smiled again, lighting up the room, “so I’ll finish here but I really hope you all vote for me and I assure you, I won’t disappoint.”

The hall exploded into applause again and Stan felt a light inside of

himself. She stood a higher chance than Henry, right? It sure sounded that way, with the most enthusiastic claps yet.

Stan stole a glance at Henry Bowers and saw a sour look on his face.

Maybe there was some hope.

Mike Hanlon, Lacrosse tryouts

“Oh God oh lord I’m gonna fail! I’m not gonna get in and I’m gonna fail!” Mike paced around the field, insisting that he had to be early in case he missed his last chance and all would be lost.

“You aren’t gonna fail, Mike.” Eric sighed, repeating this line for about the eighth time in the past half hour.

“How would you even fail anyway? There’s only ever us who want to do it.” Alison said, practising swinging her lacrosse stick up and down.

“I know but like, it’s been six weeks since I’ve played, what if I’ve forgotten how to?” Mike continued to stress. He wouldn’t usually be nearly this panicked about almost anything, but now that he’s in second year and has been distracted by the play, maybe he’d forgotten how to swing his stick or forgotten how to pass and even worse, forgotten how to score.

Mike knows full well that it’s a stupid thing to worry about. Completely and utterly. It’s nothing compared to Bill’s home life or Eddie’s or Bev’s. But sometimes, when he cares about something enough, he stresses like mad.

“Jesus Christ if you don’t stop clinging to your lacrosse stick like that you’re gonna snap it in two!” Chloe said, watching how his arms flexed every so often without Mike even realising it.

“Shit.” Mike almost dropped it as if we’re on fire. You’d be fooled that it wasn’t, he was sweating like anything.

“Students! I see you’re bright and early for the tryouts!” Mr Valley

smiled. He was their Pe teacher last year, though now he was just their lacrosse captain.

“Wouldn’t wanna miss it.” Eric put a reassuring hand on Mike’s shoulder, causing him to release the tension he didn’t even realise he was holding and genuinely smile.

They made their way to the lacrosse field, Greta sorting out Alison’s hair, claiming that only two knots of a hair bobble would not keep her hair up and would make her neck all sweaty, Chloe repositioning her messy bun of curls, despite Greta’s complaints. After that Mike stopped listening, humming the same part of a song over and over of which he’d only heard once in his life. He couldn’t quite pin point what it was, but it was surprisingly calming.

“See? We’re the only ones here.” Chloe said gently. “Nothing can go wrong-“

“Hey guys!” A voice chirped from behind them.

They turned around, Mike’s lacrosse stick almost bashing Eric in the process.

“I’m here to try out too!” The voice was none other than Sandie’s. She walked up into the line they were standing in and smiled excitedly. “Isn’t this fun? In my old school I used to do lacrosse but broke my ankle because of it, that’s where I got this scar.” She pointed down to her shoes where a great big white scar sat directly on her ankle bone. Mike frowned at it, sympathy rising in him. “I lost my courage for years, but when I saw you guys play last year, I just had to try out this year!”

“Ah, we have a new try-outer I see. And you are...?” Mr Valley asked.

“Sandie. Sandie Millman.” She beamed.

“Looks like you guys will have some competition.” Mr Valley turned around and picked up a spare lacrosse stick, noticing Sandie didn’t have one, and gave it to her.

Mike leant his head down on his stick. Now he was in dilemma. He so badly wanted to be in the team, but he also wants Sandie to feel

welcomed.

‘Shut up.’ another part of his brain shushed him. ‘You wanted this so badly, don’t throw it away just because some girl shows up with a history of lacrosse in her hands. You want this, so you will go and get it’.

Mike stood up straight and nodded to himself, if he loved something, he would get it, or at least a attempt to, no matter what the cost.

“Good luck guys!” Sandie cheered excitedly, letting Greta pull her hair around until she was happy with it.

“You know, you have such nice hair! What shampoo do you use?” Greta finished with putting what Mike thought was a pin in her hair.

“Girls! Enough about hair and get tossing!” Sir yelled from the side lines.

Mike drew in a deep breath and let it out, bending his knees in position. “You’re gonna be fine you’re gonna be fine you’re gonna be fine-“ Mike repeated like it was some sort of mantra.

“Ready, set, Go!” Mr Valley shouted and it suddenly all came back to Mike. As soon as Alison swunged the ball to Mike, he caught it swiftly and ran, passing it to Greta who tossed it to Sandie.

Sandie flung it to return it to Mike, but as soon it hit his basket, it rolled straight back out again and onto the ground. He sighed shakily and tried again, humming the song that he was still puzzled from where he’s sung it before. Mike swung the ball to Chloe.

“Over here!”

“Left! Go to the left!”

“Behind you!”

“Swing the blasted stick!”

It was returned to Mike again, this time being from Eric. He caught it perfectly and took to running to the goal, dodging everyone else.

Drawing his stick back, he swung ferociously and the ball went cruising into the net at the speed of light.

And just like that, after a few more minutes of practice tossing, the tryout was over. Mr Valley blew the whistle and they all came jogging over, sweaty and all.

"You all did very well and I can see that all of you are very passionate about lacrosse." He said, almost proudly. "But now its time for the results."

Mike sighed and nodded, in the long run, it didn't really matter. He could always play it at lunch time if he didn't get in. It didn't matter. It didn't-

"We have; Chloe," Everyone applauded and cheered happily. "Eric," Mike clapped a hand onto Eric's back and cheered. "Sandie, Alison and Greta..." Mike's heart sank. But it was ok, he knew he worked himself up so it didn't really mat-

"I'm kidding Mike, all of you got in. We could use a sub now and then." Mr Valley smiled warmly at Mike.

Mike let out a breath he didn't even realise he was holding and laughed. He got in... he got in! They all got into a group hug and congratulated each and every one of them.

"Now off with you, get changed or Matron will lose it at your sweaty appearances." Mr Valley shooed them off.

They walked off but Mike hanged back a little.

"Sir?" He said.

"Yes?"

"I just uh, wanted to say thank you." Mike nodded appreciatively.

"Well, thank you." Mr Valley smiled again. "The team wouldn't be the same without you."

And with that, Mike strolled off, a smile now plastered to his lips.

And then he heard the song again, but this time he remembered almost all of it. He got to the chorus and suddenly remembered where he'd sang it. It was with the losers.

It was Rocket Man.

Beverly Marsh, the Common Room after lessons

She was drowning. There's no doubt about it.

The water that had stayed ashore for her whole life was now coming in in barrels. It was fast and sharp and it crashed over her, filling her lungs, stinging her eyes and she never learnt how to swim.

She was sinking further and further down, her heart the true anchor.

She blinked back the salty water and looked around the common room.

It was the end of the day and God, if it hadn't been an exhausting one. The assembly, the meeting in the early hours of morning, play planning. It had totally wiped her off her feet.

Maybe that's when she fell into the sea.

She would be lying if she had told someone that this was the first time it had happened (not that she would tell anyone - if anyone even cared to ask, the automatic response would be "I'm fine"). Over the last few weeks, she'd felt herself drifting further and further away from the sand, from the Losers.

Except, in her mind, it seemed that they were drifting away from her.

As she sat alone on a sofa in the common room and watched East and North, she couldn't not notice the Losers doing their own thing perfectly fine, without a Bev Marsh at their side.

That was selfish. They didn't need her there to be happy, or have fun, or fucking live. So, why did she feel so... useless. So thrown to one side?

"They never actually cared about you" she thought, and it was such a horrible thought that had such a horrible possibility to it that she pushed it away.

Why did she feel like this suddenly? Why did she feel like she had no one?

"You good?" Patty asked, sitting down on the sofa next to her.

"Of course." Bev said, just as you would thank someone for holding a door open for you.

"Seem a bit distant." Patty said, pushing her coffee coloured hair behind her ear. "You sure."

"Sure."

"Okay." Patty said, turning to look at everyone. Eric, Chloe and Alison had their lacrosse sticks out and were hitting balled socks around the common room, something Matron would have a fit at if she saw. Greta and Audra were doing each other's hair, Audra talking to Blake while she did so, Greta just looking disgusted. Buffy and Emily were on another sofa, whispering to each other, secret smiles on their faces. Richie and Eddie had their heads together, looking over a book. Every now and then, Richie would lean further into Eddie's hair and say something and Eddie would laugh. Further back, Ben, Stan and Bill were working on a dance routine for Grease. Mike was switching between them and helping Eric.

It was a happy image, one of youth and fun, and Beverly felt like she was watching from a far off window. Her heart felt like it was being squeezed. Everything was different. She no longer fitted right in, and the worst part was, she didn't think they wanted her to fit in.

She let out a half cry half sigh and sat back, studying the scene again. That's when she noticed something.

"Hey, Patty?" She said, leaning over to her friend.

"Hmm?" Patty said.

"Where's Sandie?"

Patty's eyes creased and she looked around the common room rapidly. Once it became clear that Sandie was not there, she turned to Bev.

"I don't know." She said. "But it seems odd, doesn't it?"

"Sure does." Bev agreed.

"Maybe she's in the dormitory." Patty said, getting up. "Matron needed to sort her bed out. Come on, let's check."

Bev stood up too. "Just us?" She asked.

"Just us." Patty said.

Patty smiled, showing her dimples, and Bev stepped up off the sofa and out of the ocean.

Her and Patty snuck (or walked normally and went unnoticed, Bev realised with dismay) across the common room, keeping to the far right. Ben, Bill and Stan were still going over the opening scene, the one that they'd chosen to include earlier, and Eddie and Richie were still pouring over a book, their feet almost tangled in each other's.

Patty reached out and touched the handle when a strong voice came from Bev's ear.

"Where are you two sneaking off to?"

Patty let out a thin scream and Beverly jumped back.

Buffy and Emily were standing there, Buffy's head cocked. Bev saw the rest of the common room continuing like usual- It seemed only Buffy and Emily had seen them leaving.

"Nothing." Patty mumbled, and Bev understood that spying on a new member of their Tower wasn't exactly a welcoming party.

"Why did you jump them?" Buffy asked, going interrogation mode on them. "Come on, me and Em aren't about to rain on your parade."

Beverly looked at Patty quickly, who pursed her lips. Bev looked

back, her heart beginning to sink again. She'd know Buffy and Emily for over a year, she'd even shared a dorm with them! So why did she suddenly feel sure she couldn't trust them? Couldn't trust any of them?

Why did she feel so alone?

"We're going to check in on Sandie." Patty said, eyes flickering to the ground.

"You mean you're going to spy on her." Buffy said loudly, and Bev put a finger over her mouth, maybe even hoping that someone

(one of the losers)

would hear what was happening and care to check. But Buffy could of spoken it through a megaphone; no one listened.

"Where is Sandie, anyway?" Emily asked. Her hand was wrapped tightly around Buffy's upper arm.

"That's what we don't know." Bev said. "We think she could be in our dorm but..."

Buffy cocked her right eyebrow up and Beverly remembered the fierce way she'd defended Sandie earlier.

"Let us come then." Buffy said after away.

"Come?" Patty asked.

"Yes, come." Buffy said. "I want to see if I can actually trust her before I do. If it's as I guess, we'll see her unpacking her socks which is soooo exciting. But if not... I wanna know."

"And we can put an end to all the arguing." Emily said.

"Well, okay." Patty said, turning the handle and pushing open the door.

They filed out, and Beverly did not check to see if anyone noticed because it did not matter.

The door shut quietly behind them and they walked down the corridor that lead to the stairs that climbed up East Tower.

“So, what if she’s like, totally scheming an evil plan against us?” Buffy asked, trying to keep up with Patty’s determined speed. “Do we jump in on her or-“

“We handle it,” Patty said, “as sensibly as we can. Probably telling Mrs Wilson or something. And then she’ll move back and everyone will be happy. How does that sound?”

“People were unhappy before she came.” Emily said. “Like Bill.”

Patty snorted and Beverly touched her earlobe briefly. Yes, Bill was unhappy. He was completely destroyed, and he still is. He just doesn’t say anything. Could that be why there was a shift between them? Maybe. Maybe. Too many maybes. All Bev knew (maybe not maybe knew) was that Bill was still upset and she wasn’t doing nearly enough to help.

She wasn’t exactly one for make believe but part of her thought that maybe if she talked to him and asked how he was feeling then the spark that they had would re light and heat up his heart and hands and lips so they didn’t feel so cold when they (rarely ever, recently) kissed. If they only just talked.

Patty was about to turn up the stairs when a gallop of footsteps droned into sight. She turned around, her eyes wide, and the four pushed back, toppling over.

They were down, all right, but they were down out of sight. Laying next to the wall ensured that no one would see them, and that they were safe from whoever was walking.

“Fuck, my neck!” Buffy said.

“I think i twisted my ankle-“ Emily said.

“Shut up!” Patty hissed loudly, and Buffy and Emily feel into annoyed silence.

The footsteps grew louder until the person hopped off the last step.

She had a tall, willowy figure and very pale honey coloured hair that reached her hips. She was holding a small, cardboard box in front of her. It was clear that it was Sandie, probably just coming out of East's dormitory.

"Guys!" Bev said, propelling herself into a sitting position.

Sandie's tall, slim figure walked down the corridor and out of sight.

"Should we go after her?" Emily asked.

"Yes!" Beverly, Patty and Buffy said, getting up (Buffy extended her hand to Emily) and setting off after her, speed walking to catch up.

"You think she came from our dorm?" Patty said, jogging next to Bev.

"That's what it looks like." Bev said. They turned a corner and caught sight of her again. She was heading across the school and after following her for a few minutes it became very clear where she was going.

"Why is she going to South?" Buffy asked, speaking what everyone was thinking.

"Maybe she isn't as trustworthy as we thought." Patty said.

"Or maybe she's just bringing things back." Emily piped up. "You see the box!"

"Why couldn't she of done it yesterday?" Patty said.

"Because she only knew she was moving late yesterday?" Buffy said.

"Yeah but-" Patty said, and they argued in low voices as they neared Sandie's destination.

Beverly let their voices fade into the background and she watched Sandie go up the stairs leading to South's second year dorm.

"Guys." She hissed as Sandie slipped through the door.

Patty and Buffy dropped whatever point they were arguing and

turned to face the way Bev was. The door just swung shut.

“Come on.” Emily hissed, making her way in front. She led them until they were outside the wooden door that resembled East’s down to the brass doorknob.

“Can you hear anything?” Buffy asked. Emily shook her head.

Beverly stepped up besides Emily and pressed her ear to the door. People were talking, but their voices were muffled. Only some words were clear.

“They... Stupid... Leave...” Beverly said, saying what she heard.

“Doesn’t give much away.” Buffy said, her arms crossed.

“Tree.” Emily said.

“I think they said see-“ Beverly said, but at that moment the door opened (luckily for Bev’s and Emily’s heads, it opens inwards) and Sandie stepped out. She looked at them with almost comic surprise at first, her mouth open. Then she shut it and pushed past them, her cheeks flushed.

Bev shared a look with Patty and the four headed after her.

“Wait, Sandie!” Bev said, not wanting to leave their new member with the wrong impression. Possibilities flashed through her like lighting, striking her heart with sinking horror. Sandie really could be lost, and Bev was only pulling her further down. Why couldn’t she of just minded her own business?

“Sandie, please, let us explain!” Patty said, and Sandie swung around on her heels on the middle of the corridor.

“Explain?” She shouted. “Explain what? That’s I’m so untrustworthy you have to spy on me? That you won’t even give me a chance?”

Bev blushed deep red. “We weren’t-“ She mumbled.

“Oh please.” Sandie said. “I’m wasn’t wanted in South and now I’m not wanted in East!”

“That’s not true!” Emily protested weakly.

“Is it not?” Sandie said. She turned to Buffy. “Go on, tell me. What were you doing?”

Sandie picked her cards right; Buffy Dovoan was no liar.

“Spying.” She said, her eyes dropping to the floor.

“I guessed.” Sandie said bitterly. “For the whole of last year, I thought I knew who I was. Thought I knew who everybody else was. But it turns out I have absolutely no body!”

Her eyes never left Beverly’s and Sandie stormed off, Beverly felt the water fill up her lungs again.

Drowning.

Notes for the Chapter:

-silence-

7. Act Two, Scene Three; Why do old buildings always have ghosts?

Eddie Kaspbrak, East and North's common room

September was drawing to a bitter close, the once green leaves on the trees dissolving into an orange, the warm air now cold, grey clouds glazing over the once blue sky.

This always singled to Whitmore students that the start of the year was over. No more moaning and groaning over home, no more forgetting the lessons they had. They'd been back long enough now.

Actually, it was quiet scary. While Eddie wouldn't of said the first month went by quickly, it was certainly moving at a paste that could not be considered slow. But it wasn't how fast the weeks were flying that was worrying him, or the suspicious lack of hell from Henry Bowers. Actually, it was how little of their play they had completed.

They had every single scene they needed, and the basic scripts, but that was like a skeleton. They needed characters, and dance routines, and costumes and about a million other things Eddie's brain could explode with.

So, thank the sweet God above, a play meeting had been organised a week ago for ten am on Sunday. It was, surprisingly, Mrs Wilson who had done this. Over breakfast last week, after reading out the usual notices (sports tryouts, behavior standards, spaces in registration), she had told them that they should probably have the basics of their play figured out, and if not she'd suggest doing it soon.

Chloe had said they'd gotten the hardest part over with, and all they really needed to do was flesh out each scene and make sure the script fitted, but to Eddie, it seemed like everyone was making sure to take their sweet, sweet time before actually paying any attention to the play.

So walking into the common room with the rest of the Losers (minus Bev, who would come down with East), it finally felt like something was actually happening. That Something relaxed his shoulders and sent air into his lungs and that Something made him realise that he

worried without even knowing he did so.

But that wasn't important right now.

What was important was the ever filling up common room. East and North spilt into it, chatting and laughing at the top of their voices, making their way to the sofas scattered across the room.

"You see Bev?" Ben asked Eddie, leaning in.

Eddie scanned the room. He made out Audra's red hair and Eric's sun-kissed face, but no fire that belonged to Bev Marsh.

"Nope." Eddie said, popping the P as he watched the door.

"She seems quite." Ben says after a moment. Eddie turned to face him and saw that Ben was fiddling with his fingers as if they were clay. "Have you noticed? She seems so quite."

Yes and no. Yes Eddie has noticed the lack of Bev Marsh from Bev Marsh, and it was a hard thing to miss because there was no body quite like Bev, no body equally as tough and soft, someone who knew witty things to say and always had a crumpled pack of cigarettes under pillow which she removed like clockwork every Monday when Matron changed the beds. All of that spark that she held seemed not to be out as much, but more so dim. Only a few weak flickers.

So yes, Eddie had noticed this change in Bev, this sudden withdrawal from the group. But at the same time, he hadn't. He'd noticed it and partly acknowledged it but he'd also swept it under that old, worn rug of Denying, one Eddie wanders over every day, it seems.

Hadn't she told him about how lost she felt when they'd met over the summer, their toes dipped in the river that ran through the barrens, Bev with a cigarette in her hand and Eddie with an aspirator in his. Hadn't she told him about her Dad's stares, how his hand would ball into fists at the mere sight of her? Hadn't she flinched just that bit harder when she and Eddie were watching movies at the Aladdin and a fight scene came on? Hadn't she poured her heart out for Eddie and hadn't he understood the cracks in it?

Her father. It was him who'd broken Bev. Eddie understood this with

sympathy (and with some empathy) and he'd been there for her throughout those confusing six weeks, just as she had been there for him. And hadn't he also understood that Beverly had to be someone different sometimes, not only to draw less attention to herself from her Dad but also because sometimes it's so much easier to put a mask on.

But when they had returned to Whitemore, Eddie had just assumed that Bev would go back to her normal, loud, loveable self. And Eddie had been so blinded by the happiness of returning that he thought she had. But it was clear that something still lingered between the cracks, still stung.

Was it to do with her Dad? Or could it be something else?

Eddie wasn't sure and he felt a guilty rise of colour in his cheeks. She was his best friend, his first friend, and he'd been so preoccupied that he hadn't even checked in on her. Even after seeing Henry Bowers, they hadn't gone off to talk like they use to.

Something was different and Eddie felt like the worst person on the world.

"There she is!" Ben said, and Eddie saw Bev come through the door, arm linked with Patty. She was mid laugh, and Eddie felt an sudden urge to drag her outside and just talk to her.

"Bev!" Ben called over. She looked up, and her bright green eyes seemed to almost dim. She hesitated, something maybe only Eddie Kasprak would of noticed, then came over.

"Hey," She said, and Eddie was struck once again by how formal that seemed for Bev, "where are the others?"

"Somewhere." Eddie dismissed it. "How are you?"

"Good." Bev said, giving Eddie a paper-blank answer. "How about you."

"Fine." Eddie said, eyes hard and determined. "Are you sure you're okay?"

Bev looked up at him properly for the first time, eye creasing. "I'm sure." She said in a voice that said she wasn't sure at all. "Why, Eddie? Is something wrong."

"I don't know," Eddie said, not sure where the conversation was going but prepared to follow its direction anyway, "is it?"

Eddie and Bev looked at each other for a few seconds, reading each other's eyes as one would read a book.

"Uh, guys?" Ben said uncertainty.

Eddie pulled his eyes away and looked at Ben, just as the rest of the Losers came over.

"You think this meeting will ever start?" Mike asked, the last of Eddie's and Bev's conversation dissolving, going to hide in the cracks of the floorboards and corners of the room, like some sort of ghost.

'Yes, a conversation ghost' Eddie thought with some sort of bitter amusement. 'How many conversation ghosts are really haunting me? Because boy oh boy, there are some conversations I feel like I'll never have with people, no matter how many times I think of them.'

His eyes fell to Richie, who was telling Bill and Stan something in one of his voices, and Eddie felt his heart jump like it normally did when he looked at Richie.

So he looked away.

"Okay, I think we're all here!" Chloe said, taking the natural lead she often did.

"Finally." Stan said, and the seven turned to face Chloe as she stood in the centre of the room.

The rest of East and North stood in a wavering circle around her, and Eddie spotted Sandie in the corner, next to Emily. She looked tentative but also the most at ease Eddie had seen her so far. That was good, Eddie thought. To be unwelcome, to be excluded for simple being you... he knew that feeling. He felt like he would always know that feeling, like it ran through his blood.

“So today,” Chloe said, making Eddie focus back on her, “I thought it would be fitting to actually start casting people. We have the basic scripts, which we will of course flesh out when we have the characters. But for now, let’s get the characters sorted out.”

“How are we going to audition?” Audra asked. “I mean, the people will need to sing and dance as well as act.”

“Exactly.” Chloe said, turning her head. “So if you feel, for example, that dancing is your strong suit, when we get to going over scenes, we’ll make sure you have a lot of focus on that area. But if you’re going out for a big role, then I highly suggest you’re comfortable with doing all three.”

“I guess Sandie is going to audition for Sandy.” Emily said, nudging Sandie who smiled.

“Oh, she can.” Greta said, snapping shut a little mirror. “But don’t get your hopes up. I was born for this.”

“I beg to differ.” Audra said, her hair the colour of a late fall sunset.

Greta scowled at her and opened her mouth to say something, when Chloe clapped her hands.

“Okay so this is how this is going to go.” She said. “There will be two stages. One, me and Greta will teach you a dance routine and follow, then-“

“Why you and Greta?” Buffy asked.

“Because we’ve taken classes since before we could walk.” Greta said.

“Yes,” Chloe said, being interrupted once again. “So that will show us your dance skills. Then you will go off and have fifteen minutes to chose a song and sing it, but remember to sing it with emotion. This will showcase your singing and some of your acting. You can also do this in groups.

“Is everyone clear?” She asked. “Any questions?”

“Yeah, me again.” Buffy said. “Who’s going to actually cast people?”

“Well,” Chloe said, looking a bit uncertain. “I thought about this last night and I think it makes sense that we all have an input and I was thinking about asking Matron to help judge but-“

“I’ll do it.” Bev said quickly, and Eddie turned around. Her eyes looked determined but Eddie knew by the clench of her fist that she had acted on impulse.

“You do?” Chloe asked.

“Yes.” Bev said. “I’d prefer to help direct instead of act, if that’s okay.”

“Sure.” Chloe said kindly. “And we’re all going to act but you can of course have a minor role, if you wish.”

Bev nodded and smiled, turning around briefly to look at the Losers in a sort of ‘I-Hope-You-Dont-Mind’ way.

Eddie’s brain felt like it was twenty steps behind what was actually happening. Why did Bev suddenly want to direct? Hadn’t she said would love to be one of the pink ladies to Eddie a few weeks ago? So, why the sudden change?

It was just a stupid play, with stupid scripts and a group of stupid kids but Eddie still couldn’t grasp onto Bev. Why hadn’t she told the losers she wanted to direct? It was kind of a big thing.

That ghost that sometimes haunts Eddie’s mind whispered that, yes, Bev hadn’t told Eddie but had Eddie ever asked?

And that question haunted Eddie.

“So, if everyone is ready, I guess we’ll start...” Chloe said, and there was a chorus of agreement.

She walked over to the stereo in the corner of the room and sorted through the music as everyone got into lines of three. As it was Sunday, people were in their regular outfits rather than school uniforms, making it way more easier to dance.

“I’m g-g-going to s-ss-s-suck at th-this.” Bill mumbled from his space

next to Mike.

“Oh, Billy boy, don’t be so negative!” Richie said, grinning widely, showing his teeth. “Dance da night awaay!”

“Richie, that was terrible.” Bev said, shaking her head and

(you didn’t ask you didn’t ask you did)

laughing sweetly.

“Well, my lady, you can judge on that lady.” Richie said, tipping Bev a wink.

“May i request a big role.” Mike said. “You know, when you pick parts.”

“I’m not bias.” Bev said solemnly.

“Well I just wish I wore something a bit more dance ready.” Ben said. “Like maybe a parachute.”

“How would you wear a parachute?” Stan asked.

“Well you’d-“ Ben started, but at that moment, Chloe’s finger pressed down on the Stereo and didkmams started to play.

“Follow my lead!” Greta called from the front.

“Our lead.” Chloe said, stretching her arms.

Eddie looked at Richie. “I’m going to be so bad, they’ll cast me as the car.” He said lowly.

Richie laughed, his eyes bright behind his coke-bottle glasses. “Eds Gets Off a Good One!”

“Yeah, whatever.” Eddie said, looking at his keds which had become suddenly amazingly fascinating.

The ghost danced on his lips like a whisper again, those words that could change everything, that would change everything. The words he’d sometimes imagine saying at night, laying in his bed, looking

through the gap in the curtains out at the ink-black night sky.

He didn't think he'd ever have enough courage to say them.

"Okay, is everybody ready?" Chloe called, sounding like a yoga teacher in a second forms common room.

"Yeeeeeah." East and North called back.

"Okay, let's go!"

It was very apparent that Chloe and Greta had taken classes. Their moves seemed perfectly thought through and elegantly done, their timing almost hypnotising. Their movements were that of slow thunder, and keeping up (though Chloe and Greta made it look easy) was hard.

Eddie found himself too slow, his mind still fully digesting their movements before he actually copied them, and by that time, they'd already moved on. And he'd almost kicked Stan twice when trying to do a fast high-kick thing.

There was truly a mix of reactions in the room. Some people were behind, like Eddie, some people were loosing their spacing and others were doing pretty well.

Bev and Stan were only slightly better than Eddie, and that was down to the fact they hadn't accidentally taken somebody's head off yet. Mike, even though he wasn't hitting all the exact moves, somehow made it work anyway, in a way Eddie felt sure only Mike Hanlon could do. Ben was moving with surprising grace, and while he wasn't following the moves exactly, he still looked elegant.

Richie was doing well too, moving swiftly in time with the music in a way that reminded Eddie of the beautiful birds that would take off from the beach at sunrise, their big wings flapping in a perfect rhythm, looking striking against the bruised sky.

But Bill was the real surprise. Not only was he getting everything Chloe and Greta down, but he was getting it down well. He wasn't as good as Chloe or Greta but he definitely had a certain quality about him that set him apart from everyone else.

They went through it again, this time with Greta dancing and Chloe walking around the room, judging everyone. By the time the song finished, Eddie felt exhausted.

“Shit, that was rough.” Bev said, fanning herself with her hand.

“I’m sweating buckets.” Mike agreed.

“You were good, Mike.” Ben said. “And you too, Bill. You looked like a professional.”

“Yeah Bill, since when did you take dancing lessons.” Eddie joked, still panting.

Bill beamed at them and shook his head. “I d-didn’t, a-a-asshole. I d-don’t know, it j-j-just came n-n-naturally.”

“I see a Danny Zuko.” Richie teased.

But before Bill could reply, Chloe clapped her hands and everyone fell silent.

“That was really good!” She said and Eddie saw with faint jealousy that she didn’t seem to be sweating at all. “Now for the singing part. Pair off, you have fifteen minutes. Bev, can you come to help?”

Bev slipped off and the silence of the common room shattered. Talking broke out, people picking partners and choosing songs.

“We’re together.” Richie said determinedly, taking Eddie’s hand and dragging him to another part of the common room.

“Do you ever quit?” Eddie said, his voice coming out a whole lot softer than it was meant to.

“You know I don’t, spaghetti.” Richie said, beaming at him.

“Don’t call me-.”

“Spaghetti, yeah, yeah, I know.” Richie said, and beamed at him. “So, you want to actually practice?”

And so they did. Richie picked a song because he lived and breathed music (Eddie had told him that he ate vinyls for dinner once and Richie laughed so hard he had to sit down) and Eddie choreographed (or tried to) a dance to do with it. something that resembled a dance. It was a mess but it was a beautiful mess, one that lived and breathed youth, one that didn't carry worries in the shapes of pills or medicine and before Eddie knew it, their fifteen minutes had been laughed away.

"If everyone is ready, I say we go for it!" Chloe said, once again drawing all voices from the room.

"Oh shit, we have to do this in front of everyone." Eddie said, walking back to the circle with Richie.

"It'll be fine, Eds." Richie eased, pulling Eddie closer to him.

And it was fine. In, fact, it almost didn't feel like an audition. No, that word was big and serious and him and Richie singing Africa by Toto was the most un serious thing Eddie had done in his life. And they weren't the only ones; Buffy and Emily did a ridiculous performance to Girls Just Wanna Have Fun (though Eddie thought they still sounded good) and Eric had practically done a parody.

After a very chaotic half an hour, everyone but Sandie had performed. She stepped delicately forward as everyone clapped and slapped each other on the back, looking like the last autumn tree in winter.

"Should I go now?" She asked, although it didn't sound much like a question.

"Oh!" Chloe said, her cheeks fading into a rosy pink. "Yes! Yes, of course!"

Sandie smiled, and Greta and Chloe took formation behind her.

"She asked to use them to dance with her?" Blake said with a sort of sorry amusement.

"If she's no good then we don't have to add her, I suppose." Audra said. "She might not have our natural born talent."

Eddie crossed his arms and looked out at Sandie, Chloe and Greta. Greta looked annoyed, probably because she wanted to have the main role, Eddie realised, and even Chloe was starting to look a bit tired.

“The moment I wake up
Before I put on my makeup
I say a little prayer for you”

The dance wasn't as hard as the one earlier but it was still undeniable good. And Sandie's singing was... good. It was really good. It was light but strong too, and it had a melodic sound to it. Greta and Chloe obviously noticed, and with every high-kick Greta did, an eyeball followed. But even Greta and Chloe's dancing didn't take the attention away from Sandie. Though it wasn't the cry of angels (and secretly, Eddie preferred Richie's singing), it was still good. Really good.

She finished and flashed everyone a smile. After a brief pause, the claps came. But along with them came uncertainty. Sandie was a spark, and a bright one. She burnt and burnt and burnt and she'd only just started to show them what she could do. And that was... was... was jarring? Yes, jarring for reasons Eddie couldn't immediately place. But if Sandie could do all this, what else did her and the res of South and West have up their sleeves?

“Okay!” Chloe said, clapping for another record breaking time. “Me and Bev will talk this over, and then we'll put the casting list up. Of course, if anyone has any problems, we can all discuss as towers.”

She smiled and the chat, as if on pause, resumed. Eddie and Richie regrouped with the Losers and they all started talking.

“Sandie was insane!” Ben said.

“I th-th-think Audra is b-b-better.” Bill said. “She'll t-take lead.”

“Yeah, speaking of lead.” Mike said, grinning. “You can sing and dance and act? Who knew Bill was so multi talented.”

Mike was referring to Bill's audition where he not only sung

exceptionally well (and without a stutter), but acted well too. His voice was decently one of the best Eddie had heard today, and it was funny to think of their stuttering Bill as someone who was as good as performing as he was.

They spoke in the stuffy common room, many of them totally wiped out but happy, when Chloe called their attention. A list of names was stuck to the common room wall near their timetable and as everyone scampered towards it, Eddie felt loose butterflies fluttering in his chest.

Grease Cast!

Danny - Bill

Sandy - Audra

Kenickie - Richie (you're welcome - Bev)

Marty - Sandie

Jan - Patty

Frenchy - Emily

Rizzo - Buffy

Doody - Mike

Sonny - Ben

Roger - Eddie

Cha Cha - Greta

Leo - Stan

Patty - Chloe

Coach - Eric

Principal - Alison

Mrs. Murdock - Beverly

Vince - Blake

Eddie read his name and the butterflies in his stomach seemed to all fly away, disappearing into the night like

(ghosts)

they were never there.

He had a part. It wasn't massive but it was still good. He knew Roger was in most scenes, even if he didn't speak much. And Bill had gotten the lead! Bill Denough, stuttering loser, had gotten the lead.

“Way to go!” Richie said, hugging Bill. “Man this will be ace.”

“My main scene is my driving a car and I don’t even think we can do that.” Stan said, but his eyes still shone like the sun after heavy rainfall.

“Guyssss!” Bev said, pushing her way through to them.

“Bev, you casted me as Kenickie!” Richie said, his face the image of pure happiness that made Eddie’s heart feel so light he thought he would float.

“You were good!” Bev said. “Chloe thought so too.”

“And you casted Bill as main.” Stan said in monotone, though his eyes still had that happy glow.

“You were really good!” Bev said, looking at Bill with her dancing green eyes.

“Th-th-thanks.” Bill said, and for a second it seemed like they were going to kiss... but then it passed, like a grey raincloud.

“Thank you, Bev!” A voice said, and Sandie came up behind her. “I love Marty, she’s my favourite pink Lady!”

“You’re welcome.” Bev said, and that spark in Sandie’s eyes burnt brighter.

And Eddie thought suddenly that you can’t get fire without smoke.

Mike Hanlon, The dining hall (but without the normal tables)

It was officially voting day at Whitemore, which meant nothing to 97% percent of students, and would normally mean nothing for Mike. However, due to circumstances that started with H and ended with enry Bowers, it did mean something.

A big something.

As the Losers had said before, if Henry became head boy, it would

become a whole lot easier for him to bully not only Bev and Eddie but potentially other people. Bev had called him manipulative during the head assembly and it was a word Mike kept coming back to, a word would wander into his head at the most random times and take a jog or maybe even a slow run before Mike could fully shake it.

Because, as weird as it sounded, you had to be smart to be manipulative. At least, Mike thought so. Because to manipulate someone you had to be self aware, and Mike knew that it took a brain to do that.

To be self aware and calculated. That was the key.

Mike just hoped Henry didn't have what it took to open the door to the teachers. Because that door would lead open to the steel blue sky and crumbling grey cliffs that drooped off the sides of Whitmore, and it wouldn't be Henry Bowers stepping out of it; oh no. It would be the Losers, their faces pale and scared, walking out and off, out and off into the air, out and off onto the space under their feet that didn't exist, until they were falling, falling, falling with no way out.

Henry Bowers being elected would mean a one-way road of pure misery for the Losers, but more specificity for Bev and Eddie.

All the Losers knew that, while Henry would undoubtedly make their lives living hell (seven for the price of two!), he would target Bev and Eddie the worst. Those were the two he had a history with, a history that involved chases and bloody noses, and he wouldn't want to just stop now. He had motives, terrible, messed up motives, but to a guy like Henry Bowers, that was fuel.

So much was on the line and Mike would not let anything happen to his friends. At first, he wanted Eddie to tell someone but once it became clear Eddie would not do that (the scar on his upper arm still made Mike feel sick to his stomach - the very thought that a person could do that to somebody as sweet and caring as Eddie Kaspbrak astonished him), he retreated to the last resort of voting for someone else who wasn't Henry, and making sure others did the same.

And he had no doubt in his mind who he would vote for as he walked into the hall that Sunday.

There were three small, wooden tables all across the back wall, with a large, yellow banner saying 'Use your voice and vote' strung up above them. Each table had a purple box with a dark slit at the top where you were meant to drop your vote. Next to these boxes were a stack of voting cards.

A trail of students were lined behind all three of these voting stations, with three or four teachers supervising from around the sides. The losers all got in the same line, lengthening it by quite a lot, and began to talk immediately.

"I can't see him." Eddie said, looking around.

"Probably bu-by-because he's n-n-not h-here." Bill said. "D-d-doesn't want to s-s-ss-see himself lu-lose."

Mike laughed at this, the happy sound escaping his lips. But it did nothing to reassure Eddie or Bev, both who were looking around worriedly like a surprise bear attack may strike any minute.

"Are you sure you don't want to tell anyone." Stan said as the line shuffled on. "Not even Matron or someone?"

"Not yet." Bev said. "If it gets bad then yes. But I just don't feel like it's a good idea right now."

"Agree." Eddie said, linking his arm with Bev. "I don't want to be pushed around by him but I've honestly tried to tell people before. Nothing happened."

Mike saw Bev give Eddie's arm a reassuring squeeze and Eddie smiled at her. Their shared trauma seemed to be doing a lot more than any of their words were in helping, and Mike understood that maybe the mer knowledge of knowing you're not the only one going through something was enough.

Maybe that's the whole point of everything - people. Because at the end of the day, people are just people. They hurt and cry and laugh but for what? Nothing. Nothing, if you had nothing, that is. But if you have something, something worth fighting and living for, then maybe there is a reason.

People need people. To hurt with and to cry with and to laugh with and to be with, plain and simple.

When Mike got his voting paper with the five names on, Henry Bowers big and bold at the bottom, he didn't even glance at it. His pencil went straight to the last box, with the name Aliya Caavemon next to it.

His pencil drew two lines, making them cross into a large X. Then, he dropped the paper in the box.

"Didn't vote for Henry?" Stan asked when Mike walked away.

"No shit." Mike laughed, his voice a hazy orange vibrating around his body. Stan smiled at him with his eyes the colour of the sky on a warm summers evening and Mike knew that he needed Stan. He needed all the Losers but Stan in particular. There was something about the way Stan was able to put everything into perspective, how he could make Mike feel infinite, that was so rare.

And Mike felt truly lucky to be able to feel that way.

Stan Uris, Common Room

"Ok right," Chloe drew a chair close to her and sat on it the opposite way you'd usually sit on a chair, holding bunches of pieces of paper in her hand which Stan could only assume were scripts. She chucked one to everybody, Stan just barely catching his. "These are your scripts. Don't lose them because it's a lot of paper that has been used and Matron will have a bird."

Stan flicked through the slightly warm piece of script that, if he was honest, wasn't that much bigger than what consisted in one of his text books.

"And before you all say anything, this is the draft script so that we can get an idea of the play once it's running." Chloe explained, not being able to contain her grin.

Stan felt the same, but he had practice in keeping his emotions to himself to not stand out in certain places. It felt nice to be apart of something. Nice to be in a community. It was completely and utterly different to his home life and he'd almost forgotten what it was like to actually be with his friends every single day during the summer holidays, but he was ok with that. He liked the change.

"Just, uhh, quick question." Stan almost put up his hand but threw it back down again without hesitation.

"Yeah?" Chloe looked up.

"How do you propose we do that driving seen? You know with Danny against Leo?" Stan tucked his hair behind his ears in thought.

"Well, we can cross that bridge when we come to it." Chloe said surely. "But first I say we all go to the drama hall and start practicing."

"Isn't this so amazing! Putting on a play all together!" Sandie bumped into Stan and spoke rapidly to him, linking his arm as they made their way to the hall.

"Yeah, um pretty- pretty cool." Stan chuckled uncomfortably. Don't get him wrong, he liked Sandie. And felt extremely bad for her. But she could be a little bit... out there, possibly, for Stan's liking. He spotted the losers walking together up ahead and more than anything wanted to just slip out of Sandie's grip and run after them, but he knew he couldn't do that, it'd be rude. So he just bit his cheek and tried to ignore the fact his arm was sweating tremendously.

"Let's start with, well, the starting scene!" Bev called from the front, her smile getting lost in the paper work. Or so he thought. He couldn't really tell recently. It would be like one minute a smile attached to her face, so tightly screwed it couldn't go away even if she wanted it to, but then for the next few minutes- few days, it wouldn't be there whatsoever. As if the tool kit had been lost so she couldn't even find a way to screw it back on.

Stan looked at the other losers, who looked perfectly fine with practicing lines and laughing whenever Richie did one of Eddie's

lines in a Scottish accent or whatever, all bar one. Ben continued to look at Bev when everybody else had looked away as soon as she'd finished speaking. Puzzled written across his forehead.

"Hey, you ok?" Stan walked up to him and cautiously placed a hand on his shoulder. Ben jumped a little bit other than that he barely flinched.

"Yeah, yeah fine." Ben smiled a smile which everybody knew said 'I'm Not Fine'. "It's just, I don't know man, Bev seems... off."

"Hmm." Stan hummed in agreement.

"I mean look, she's not even standing with us." Ben said, fiddling with the sides of his script, making them creased and half folded. Stan looked at Bev. "Do you think we've done something?"

"I don't know." Her eyes slanted down solemnly as she did her best attempt of a smile at Audra, who was now dancing around in front of her. Bev looked up and caught Stan's eye. In any other situation, Stan would've looked away as quickly as his eyes would let him, but he just smiled at her. Just as Stan was about to motion for her to come over, her eyes dropped back to Audra, who was now kicking her leg dramatically into the air.

"I just... want to make sure she's ok." Ben said quietly, absentmindedly tearing off a corner of the sheet. Stan put his hand on Ben's in order to stop him from ripping his whole damn sheet up.

"You can, but I don't think now would be the best time." Stan said and Ben sighed, nodding. They reunited with the losers and joined with their conversation as if they'd never left.

"Ok Bill and Audra get up on stage!" Chloe spoke through her megaphone, laughing at the sound of it.

"W-w-w-wish me l-luh-luck." Bill huffed a laugh.

"That's bad luck in theatre terms!" Eddie called after him as he walked away. "It's break a leg!"

"I'm deeply offended that you'd wish something like that on me!" Bill

spoke in his so called Danny Zuko accent, zero stutter in sight. It always did fascinate Stan, how Bill's stutter would just disappear into thin air when he played a character. He wondered at what point of his life Bill found that out.

They read out their lines, Stan following through them at the same time.

"Um, there is a kiss scene? Already?" Audra asked as she stopped reading.

"Don't question me, question the movie." Chloe said through the megaphone.

"Oh yeah. That's definitely a year book quote." Richie snorted, making kiss noises at Bill who flipped him off generously.

"But don't worry," She took her megaphone away. "You don't have to kiss at this very moment."

They both nodded gratefully and continued to read through their scene, ignoring the multiple kissing moments.

"Sure glad this is a draft script and not the final thing." Audra said to Bill, who nodded in agreement. "Hey uh, Chloe? Would you mind getting rid of at least three of the kissing parts of the very first scene of the play?"

"I'll think about it." Chloe raised her eyebrows and smiled.

As soon as the first scene was done, the rest of the line reading had run pretty smoothly. The odd stutter here and there, surprisingly not from Bill, but since it was the first time of running through you could be forgiven.

"I think it's the time now where we have come to That bridge." Stan said as soon as it was his scene. Chloe was shrouded in thought when Bev spoke up.

"Maybe we could have people as being the car?" She said. "Like physical theatre."

Stan nodded his head slowly and looked at Bev. "That could work."

"And then on the sides we can have the outline of the car." She got up and Stan could see a little flint in her eyes that just reignited by the smallest puff of smoke. "So Stan if you kneel there," she pointed at a spot on the stage. "And Bill there," she pointed a little bit away from Stan. "We can have like four people surrounding them, or three depending on whose on stage or not, and they can be holding outlines of the car around them."

Stan grinned at her, supportively. She looked down at him and her smile may not have faltered so much, but the flint blew out like a match stick on a windy day.

"Great idea! Emily, would you mind writing that down in your note book?" Chloe asked Emily, giving a thumbs up to Bev.

"Sure." Emily smiled lightly, grabbing her note book and sparkly purple pen she had previously placed on the stage.

"Ok let's just skip that scene for now and go straight to the next one." Chloe said and they all flipped a couple of pages ahead.

As everybody was reading there lines and all, even some prancing around to get into character, Stan felt a flicker of excitement course through his veins. He didn't quite know why, since it was only the first run through, but it felt like their play was actually getting somewhere now. It felt like they had a chance against whatever south and west were planning, like their work would hopefully pay off.

And better yet, through all of it, Stan was having fun.

Ben Hansom, Common Room

Ben had read a book once, when he was still living with his Mum. It was a small, secondhand paperback book, the pages all a dark yellow colour. You'd get a musty smell of old parchment every time you opened it (though Ben didn't mind) and at some places, the words were so blotted, you couldn't make out if it was a O or a C or a I or a L.

But those things hadn't mattered to seven year old Ben Hansom. In fact, he'd had an fascination with the book, reading it every second he could.

It was about a girl who was so lonely she talked to the moon.

It didn't seem much to Mrs Hansom, and if any of the other Losers had found it on the shelf in the common room, their eyes would of probably passed by it. But to Ben, something about it made him so attached to the pages.

He didn't realise at the time (for a seven year old to know they were lonely is a difficult thing), but he related to the girl. As Ben would go home to his boxes stacked with lego and his small TV in the living room, the girl would go back to her lighthouse, climb to the top and speak to the moon.

Lonely.

And as Ben watched Sandie sit on the sofa in the common room, observing everything with bright eyes, he saw that girl in her too.

Her wavy hair, which was the colour of sunshine, reminded Ben of the beach in the book, and her soft, deep blue eyes the sea.

She was lonely, and Ben felt bad for her.

He wondered if the others did as well. He thought Bev may, and maybe even Mike and Eddie, but he almost felt the need to go talk to her. Because watching her perched at the side of the sofa, eyes dull as she tried to make conversation, it was like watching himself in third person.

So he did.

Ben Hansom was never really one for reckless decisions, and just standing up off the sofa him and the Losers were on gave him a slight adrenaline rush, but he thought that if he was still that first former sitting all alone in that café, he'd want someone to talk to him.

"Hey." He said as he approached her.

Sandie looked up, her delicate eyebrows creasing slightly. “Hi..?”

“Wanna talk outside?” Ben said somewhat lamely.

Sandie still looked confused, but she nodded, and her and Ben left the common room together.

They went outside, Sandie pushing the door closed and muffling the happy screams from inside. Then, they went to the grand staircase and sat down.

Hardly anyone was about. It was like a midnight road, only the occasionally car driving past in it's slow, steady pace.

Ben sat down on the top step and Sandie sat to his left, her hands held together over her skinny legs. She looked out over the staircase like someone who felt slightly sea-sick would look out over at the ocean from a boat.

“You here to tell me I don't belong in East or something?” She said, not looking at Ben.

“No.” Ben said. He looked down the steps too, watching as a gaggle of third formers passed down below, laughing in their own little world.

Worlds collide, sometimes, somehow. And Ben guessed the collision of East and South was still happening. The loudest bang had happened but there was still the after mass, ripples that you couldn't see but still moved things.

“I trust you.” Ben said finally. It was plain and simple and maybe even stupid. But it was true.

Sandie looked at him at last, her eyes searching. “You do?”

“Sure.” Ben said. He shuffled a bit closer to her as a Top Former passed, her chocolate hair up in a neat bun. “Everyone always jumps to the worst conclusions and while they do have reason to, I wouldn't like to be in your position.”

“Thanks.” Sandie said, looking warmly up at Ben.

"It's cheesy, I know." Ben said. "But I'm giving you a chance."

She smiled again, then her face fell. "I just feel so alone. I'm no longer part of South and it doesn't much feel like I'm part of East. I don't have anyone."

"You have me. Ben said, then blushed wildly at how romantic that sounded. "As a friend."

"Well, thank you, friend." Sandie said, then giggled. The sound echoed off the walls, bouncing off the corners and cracks, a sound that brought a new warmth to the staircase. You could almost see it, Ben thought, and he smiled too.

"So tell me about yourself." He said as the last of Sandie's laugh faded forever. "All I know is that you were treated like crap then left for East."

Sandie wrinkled her nose. "Ugh, such cliché." She said, but spoke on anyway. "I took dance till I was eight, riding lessons when I was five."

"Horse riding?" Ben said, curious.

"Yeah." Sandie said, grinning. "I wanted them so badly when I was younger, and for my fifth birthday, my Mum took me."

"How'd it go?"

"One came right up to me and I ran away screaming."

They looked at each other seriously and then laughed. It made Ben's heart feel like a balloon, rising and rising until it was floating past the gentle clouds, drifting away and away and away. It was a bubbly feeling, one that came from somewhere that seemed deeper than his stomach. They laughed until Ben's jaw ached and then they laughed some more. And during that laughter, Ben Hansom and Sandie Millman became friends.

"Okay, okay!" Sandie shrieked, a tear running down her cheek. "Enough! Before I go loony!"

Ben gulped back his last laughs and sat up, red faced but smiling.

“So you know about me.” Sandie said, her cheeks two blossoming roses. “Good dancer, bad horse-rider. What about you?”

“There’s not much to know about me.” Ben said, leaning back on his hands.

“Really?” Sandie said. “You strike me as a romantic musical type.”

“No way.” Ben said, hoping he was a good liar.

“Mmm.” Sandie said knowingly, she laughed again. “Okay, so what does Ben Hansom like? Art? Math?”

“I quite like photography.” Ben said honestly.

“You do?” Sandie said, her eyes suddenly bright like a constellation of stars an astronaut could get lost in. “I do as well! My grandma got me this far out camera two years ago and I’ve been obsessed ever since!”

“Really?” Ben said, eager to talk about something he loved. “Mine’s an 35mm.”

“Same!” Sandie said. “It took a bit of getting use to, especially getting the right focus for different distances, but I’m like totally a pro now.”

Ben grinned at her and then then a a scatter of Fourth Years came past them, meaning Ben had to move up so they could get past.

Yes, worlds collide. Friends collide and enemies collide and love collides and hate collides. But Ben thought that was a good thing. A wonderful thing. Because it opened a door, a door that was normally unreachable. It led to chances. And chances led to millions of different paths, leading out the sparking water by the sea or the bitter mountains.

Collide.

Yes, Ben liked that word. And he quite liked Sandie too. Except he didn’t see her as the girl that once talked to the moon on those lonely

summer nights anymore.

He saw her as a beautiful girl with a beautiful heart and Ben was happy she was sharing it with him.

They had collided.

Bill Denbrough, North's Dormitory

It was late evening when Bill felt he was finally falling into a dreamless sleep when he heard loud shuffling. He turned over, waking himself up non intentionally more and more. He huffed.

Bill often got like this at home, but that was mainly because of all the happenings with Georgie and how it all hung over him like a cloud on a breathless day. Now he just wasn't thinking. He wanted to do one thing and one thing only, was that too much to ask for?

He clamped his eyes shut. If Bill was honest, he felt like crying. Everything seems a whole lot worse at night and now Bill is contemplating whether to just ball his eyes out there and then all over sleep. Bill sat up and stared around bleary eyed, jealous of the rhythmic sound of everybody's soundless sleep. Everybody's except one.

Bill sighed in mild relief, knowing that he wasn't the only one awake in what felt like the entire world. His head dropped heavily back down his pillow and shut his eyes.

And then he felt it. Like a niggling feeling in the pit of his stomach. He'd been known to subconsciously worry about things before but not so much as for them to keep him awake at night.

Bill squinted his eyes open slightly and almost jumped out of skin. He gasped and rolled off the other side of his bed, loud enough that he was sure the Antarctic penguins would stir.

"Relax dude, it's me." It was Richie, clambering across Bill's bed to help him up.

“W-w-wh-wh-wha-w-wh-what are y-y-you-“

“Shh, I jus- I couldn’t- uh,” Richie stammered, hauling Bill’s duvet back onto his bed. “I couldn’t sleep.”

“M-m-m-me neither, a-actually.” Bill rubbed the back of his head from where it had collided with the corner of his bedside table. “I th-th-thuh-think I also have a m-mild c-c-concussion.”

“It’ll be fine.” Richie waved off the issue as if he were swatting an annoying fly.

“W-What time is it eh-anyway-?” Bill asked, patting around for his watch on his bedside table.

“Like half nine? I dunno.” Richie said, fiddling around with his glasses. For a few minutes they sat in silence, which was oddly weird since Richie could just about make a conversation out of anything.

“J-Jesus Chris Rich, c-c-cat got your tongue?” Bill joked, laughing silently. But Richie didn’t retort quickly as he would usually with one of his infamous ‘your mom’ jokes. He just continued to wipe his already polished glasses for what seemed like an eternity. “H-h-hey, you ok?”

“Can we talk?” Richie finally asked, making eye contact with bill and holding it. He looked troubled, as if his body was here and present but his headspace was elsewhere.

“Sh-sh-sure? That’s what w-we’re doing ah-ah-aren’t we?” Bill said, eyebrows knitting together.

“I mean like, somewhere else.” Richie clarified, placing his glasses on his head at last.

Bill shrugged. “Ok. Where to then, on this fine evening.” Bill practiced his Danny Zuko voice yet again, trying to get the knack of it.

Richie looked up to the ceiling and back down at Bill again, this time grinning.

“W-w-we probably sh-sh-shouldn’t-“ Bill began to shake his head but Richie was already by the doorway, offering out a hand to Bill. He slid off his bed, still off balance from when he’d fell off it but sighed anyway. He took Richie’s hand and they slipped out of the door way, shielding their eyes from the bright light which lit up the hallway. Once Bill’s eyes had adjusted, he spotted a clock on the wall as they trod clumsily up the stairs. “R-Rich it’s h-h-h-half ten.”

“Oh.” Richie said. “I guess time flies when you’re having fun not being able to sleep.”

Bill stayed quiet. It was best not to prod at Richie about his inner thoughts and mind. It was better to let him come to you, that way you know it’s voluntary and his choice. And you know something is up when Richie starts using dry sarcasm.

They reached the top, too flushed with adrenaline to be tired. Bill opened the hatch and climbed onto the roof, the view making Bill physically stop in his tracks.

“Woah.” He breathed, craning his neck so far back he thought it was gonna break. The millions of burning stars scattered all over the sky as if someone had spilt a jar of breadcrumbs over the floor. The countless constellations Bill was sure Stan knew about twenty off by heart. Then there was the moon. It’s half crescent shining a comforting light on the roof, just enough for Bill and Richie to see the odd obstacle they were sure to trip over.

“Reminds me of our last night here last year.” Richie shoves his hands in his pockets to keep them warm, both of them forgetting how it was no longer early June when the earth was warming up. It was mid September and now was the season for amber glows in the evening and winter winds during the night. Bill was definitely feeling the cold that’s for sure.

“S-s-seems so l-luh-long ago.” Bill’s breath puffed out gently in front of him.

They sat for a while, enjoying each other’s company when they weren’t constantly doing something stupid/ saying something stupid. And then bill suddenly remembered the reason Richie had jump

scared him out of bed and took him up here.

“S-so uh, what d-did you wanna talk a-about?” Bill turned his head to Richie, hugging his knees.

“Oh yeah. Forgot about that.” Richie huffed a laugh, blinking up to the sky.

“You d-don’t have to t-t-talk about it if you don’t w-w-wa-w-wan-“

“No. It’s- it’s ok. I need to.” Richie sighed, wrapping his lanky arms around his shoulders. “During the summer I um, I met someone.”

“R-r-really? You?” Bill joked, nudging Richie playfully.

“Well jeez don’t act surprised will you.” Richie let out a shaky laugh, steam dissolving into the night air.

“W-w-well, wh-w-What was her n-name?” Bill asked after a moment or two.

“That’s the thing,” Richie swallowed heavily. Bill’s face remained impassive but inside his thoughts were flashing around, one after another like lightning. “It wasn’t a... girl.” Richie has mentioned about him possibly being bisexual before, so it wasn’t a complete shock to Bill. More than anything, he was unbelievably happy for him.

“W-w-wh-What was his name?” Bill corrected himself, looking at Richie with soft eyes.

Richie seemed to smile fondly at the memory, but his expression quickly changed. One that Bill couldn’t quite identify. “Conor. We met on holiday actually, we were at the same hotel and I guess things just... went from there.”

“D-d-d-did you-“

“No, we didn’t kiss.” Richie cut Bill off, reading his mind.

“Why not?” Bill asked slowly.

Richie sighed again and looked out towards the sea, watching as the water reflected the light of the moon in infinite different patterns that even one of the best artists couldn't even paint.

"Because I don't love him." Richie replied simply, still not breaking eye contact with the waves. Bill didn't quite understand what Richie was referring to but Bill never did with these things. He just nodded and hugged his knees closer.

"Is th-there anyone else?" Bill didn't know why Richie decided to talk to him about this. He didn't know jack shit about love or feelings. Whatever Bill could say he knew it would be the wrong thing and end up ruining the situation. "I'm s-s-suh-s-sorry, I didn't m-m-mean--"

"It's fine," Richie turned back to Bill. "I just needed to get this off my chest."

"A-a-and you th-thought picking m-me was the b-b-b-buh-best option?" Bill asked, almost laughing.

But Richie didn't crack a smile. He just nodded and said, "Yeah. I trust you."

Bill let a grin pass his lips without even having the chance to think about what he was doing, and soon they were both chuckling quietly in the dark like a bunch of losers. Which was exactly what they were.

Losers.

"Come on, l-l-l-let's go inside b-b-before we catch n-n-pneumonia." Bill said, standing up and beginning to shiver uncontrollably.

They headed back through the way they came, enjoying the warmth thoroughly. They slid back into their dorm and hopped into bed.

"N-night Rich." Bill whispered.

"Sweet dreams, my darling Billy." Richie blew a kiss to Bill. He rolled his eyes and smacked his head on the pillow.

And that's when the feeling left. The feeling of worry but not

knowing what it was about had suddenly left his stomach and he felt, tired, but content too.

And out of all of it, he thought; maybe he (and the losers) needed Richie more than he thought.

8. Act Three, Scene One; We do what we want to do

Notes for the Chapter:

We missed publishing last week because me and Alice were off on holiday but our schedule is back on track!

Beverly Marsh, Sewing Class

“3,2,1...go!”

“So dramatic.” Eddie sighed, turning around on the little wooden stalls they sat on and faced his sewing machine.

“Who’s going to sew their hands together first?” Beverly said, and Eddie let out a small laugh.

It was third period, which was sewing class. Bev didn’t mind it that much; the room had a musty smell about it that you could grow to love and the racks of clothes that stood by the side, the soft colours mixed together, made Bev think of ice cream and lush fields.

Admittedly, she was also good at sewing (better than Stan and Richie, that was for sure), and letting the sewing machine go over the fabrics, imbedding it with thread was enormously satisfying to her. But it wasn’t just that. No, she also liked the feeling of being in control. Being in control of where the lines were stitched and what pattern she made. It reassured her that she was at least in charge of something.

But, for one reason or another, Beverly really wasn’t feeling it today. The constant humming of the machines was a bit too loud, a bit too much. All the colours seemed so artificial, and her brain felt like it was on overdrive. She could barely think and she just wanted to scream.

Scream.

There had been so much building up inside her over the last few weeks. Her heart was an old photo album, with hundreds of different

coloured snapshots, all telling different versions of different stories. And she was keeping it closed and locked. Closed and locked, with the key far away. Per usual. And maybe if things were different, maybe if this was a year ago, she would of opened up. Let the Losers open that album, and go over each highly exposed photo. They would of listened and sympathies and talked. But more importantly, they would of let her talk. Would let her talk still. If she just asked.

She thought she was being unfair- just because she felt like something was different didn't mean it was. After all, didn't she feel different too? And that age old question floated back to her; was she overreacting?

"Let's skip." She said to Eddie, not really knowing she was going to open her mouth and say anything.

Eddie looked up from the humming machine, his eyes reflecting her own surprise at her words. "O-oh."

"Fuck all." Bev said, meaning it with ever single bone in her body.

Eddie opened his mouth to say something when something, a ghost, maybe, darted across his eyes and he shut his mouth briefly before saying. "Fuck all."

Bev smiled a smile that felt genuine, a smile that radiated something deep within you that no one could ever quite reach. It felt like honey and sunshine, and that thought brought a comfort similar to the juttering feeling of the sewing machine.

"Okay, so maybe we ask for a loo pass..." Eddie started, giving the most basic way to skive.

"Nah," Bev said, her smile turning into a grin that felt like it was born just for Bev Marsh. "I have a better idea."

She looked up to check Mr Banks wasn't looking and then ran her index finger under the sewing machine needle. It was a shallow cut, but long, going from her knuckle to above her joint. On her pale hand, the stream of blood stood out, and Beverly suddenly felt her stomach drop, as if someone had pulled it under deathly blue waves.

But that feeling disappeared almost as soon as it came.

“Bev!” Eddie hissed, his face a reflection of worry and shock and questioning and that made Bev laugh again. “Do you know how many germs are on that needle? Do you?”

“Oh, Eddie, I do love you.” Bev said, speaking honey and sunshine. Then she stuck her hand up in the air and waved it madly around until Mr Banks noticed and came over.

“I accidentally cut my finger, Sir.” She said, like an excited five year old might express their idea.

“Oh.” Mr Banks said, looking at the stream of cherry-red blood dribble down Bev’s finger, in a way that didn’t make her feel sick, not it did not, not at all, not in the slightest-

“Can I get a plaster?” Bev said to a slightly concerned looking Mr Banks, the words coming out of their own accord.

“Yes-“ Mr Banks began, but Eddie interrupted him.

“Should I go with her, Sir?”

“I mean-“

“Thanks!” Eddie said, and he grabbed Bev’s arm before jumping up from his seat in a way that weirdly reminded Bev of microwaved popcorn.

They ran though the class, the clothes racks and posters blurring past Bev like she was traveling on the train, all the deep green fields and berry trees and twinkling creeks flashing by and she felt light headed for a few seconds, the chatter of her classmates zoning out. Then Eddie slammed the door and everything came back into focus, like someone had dropped a heavy book down.

“Come on!” Bev said, not wanting to stop for a second incase her thoughts came back like dark thunderclouds.

They ran through the empty halls and out the side door, out to the fields, out onto the outside, out, out, out.

The air was bitter and the cold nipped at Bev's uncovered arms, but she didn't even really mind. It made her feel real. Feel solid. Like she was really there, walking on the dying grass outside her true home. Because feeling real. Feeling real was sometimes hard.

"Bev, you idiot!" Eddie said, hugging his bare arms against the early October cold.

Bev remembered her finger and sucked it, tasting the coppery taste of blood in her dry mouth. It stung more than hurt, and soon it would be no more than a thin, soft pink cut.

"I should of brought my fanny pack-" Eddie began, but Bev waved him off.

"It's fine." She said, letting her hand fall to her side. "I barely felt it. Honest."

Eddie laughed lightly and the two walked in silence for a while, allowing their feet to take them over to the rocky sides of the pool. Crystals danced on the turquoise water, reflected by the golden sun that hung in the centre of the sky. Waves crashed beautifully onto the rocks like birds flying into their nests.

Bev watched the scene with crinkled eyes. It was such a rare, peaceful moment that seemed to only exist within the blurry focus of old polaroid photos. Then again, she supposed everything existed within photos at some point. Photos told hundreds of things, kept hundreds of secrets. Photos, Bev thought with some amusement, are storybooks in themselves.

"I came out to you here." Eddie said in a low voice.

Bev looked away from the pool and saw almost a scared expression on Eddie's face. She could remember it clearly; them both picking up loose littler as a punishment for skipping lessons, the quiet of the fields, the sun a dying orange glow over the sea.

"Isn't life beautiful sometimes?" She had asked Eddie.

"And absolute crap other times?" Eddie's reply had been. "Yep."

She remembered elbowing him and telling him that you shouldn't always let the bad take over and how Eddie had suddenly looked so lost and confessed that he felt like the badness was within him and when Bev had asked if it was about Eddie's mother, he had grabbed her shoulders and told her that he was gay.

He'd trusted her. And she trusted him. And to Trust, that was something.

"You're the bravest person I know." Bev said seriously, looking at Eddie. "And I miss what we had last year. I don't know what's changed but everything suddenly feels so different."

Eddie looked at her and she saw only the shadow of the boy who had let his mother control him not just a year ago. "I do too." He said honestly. "I'm sorry, Bev. I've been a shitty friend. When we came back here, I sort of just... let go of everything that had happened over the summer. That's how I cope. But I should of known it would be different for you and I should of checked up on you. I'm sorry."

Bev smiled and she heard a bird cry somewhere. "I was the one who distanced themselves. I should of talked to you. I'm sorry."

Eddie rested his head on her shoulder and she welcomed the warmth, letting it spread through her veins as a reminder that she's not all alone. She has people, the best kind of people. People she didn't have to feel afraid to be herself around, people she could share her heart with, people who would always have her bruised back.

"How've you been?" She asked eventually, and Eddie lifted his head.

"I've been." Eddie said. "What about you? How's your relationship with Bill going?"

Bev cringed at this for no good reason she could think of and thought of all the heavy air between them, heavy with unanswered questions and forgotten feelings.

"It's been better." She said. "I think we've both had tough summers." She shrugged and changed the subject. "What about you? Have you got your eyes on anyone?"

Eddie's blush answered that question for her, and she gasped.

"You do!" She said, beaming manically. "Who is it? Do I know him?"

"Shh!" Eddie said, looking around despite it being half way through third period. "I'm not, like, totally sure, okay? I may just be overreacting."

"Talk to him." Bev said, trying her earnest to opened up her picture album and share all the advice she had with her best friend. "See if it's more than just a friendship."

"What do I say?" Eddie asked. "Let's take our shirts off and kiss!"

Bev laughed honey and sunshine and scrapped her foot against the soft grass. "You'll know." She said.

Eddie smiled too but looked down. "I'm not sure."

"He's one lucky guy, that's for sure." Bev said. And she meant that with every inch of her heart.

"Bill is, too." Eddie said, and he looked so serious that Bev seriously questioned if he had been laughing a few seconds ago. "You don't always think it, Bev, but anyone with you in their life is lucky. I don't think single person in the whole wide fucking world compares to you. And I know you think the exact opposite sometimes. But it's true, okay? You're amazing, Bev."

"What makes you so sure?" Bev asked.

"Because Eddie Kaspbrak is always right." Eddie said and laughed. And at once, his image os serious was broken like the October winds blowing away the last green leaves.

Bev laughed too, and for a moment, that was the only sound on that day. Not even a photo could capture it.

Stan Uris, leaving assembly

“Well. That was a storm in a tea cup.” Stan muttered as they left the hall.

They had previously been called to yet another assembly that morning, this one being the results of who was being announced head student. Everybody in the room seemed pretty relaxed, as if it wasn't life or death for some people. Those people being the Losers club. Now they, on the other hand, had enough tension on their shoulders that even the best massagers wouldn't be able to de-knot.

Henry's expression was light and feathery for the most of the introduction, every so often his eyes landing on the losers in which his expression would go stormy. He looked at Stan with so much anger he physically shuddered and looked away. Stan didn't understand why Henry had so much hatred for all of them, he barely knew five of them.

Just when Stan felt like he was falling asleep through it all, a round of applause had jolted his lolling head which felt like it was being held down by a ton of bricks. Stan blinked around in surprise, looking at Mike who had a stone cold face. A rare look for Mike Hanlon. And it seemed the rest of the losers had it too.

That round of applause was for Henry Bowers. Stan's heart flipped inside him, one after the other, more and more.

‘Oh God he's won!’ Was Stan's immediate thought. He placed his head on his knees and didn't move. He didn't want to move until the final day of second year when Henry Bowers would be gone. But then Henry would probably find a way back o to their lives knowing him. He'd probably become a part time teacher and be made their form tutor. That's when Stan knew he'd be screwed. Screwed screwed.

“And the winner is...” Mrs Wilson sing-songed. Stan lifted his head slowly in confusion. ‘Hasn't Henry just won?’ He'd thought.

“Y-y-y-Yeah you were a-as-asleep for a l-l-long time dude.” Bill chuckled. Stan turned his head to Bill and flicked his shoulder. “Ow!”

“That's what you get for watching me sleep,” He flicked him again. “And not waking me up.”

“Aliyer!” Mrs Wilson cried, and an even bigger round of applause rose into the room, some people even whistling and standing up.

Eddie turned to everybody and clung on to Richie as if he were his life line, wide eyed and smiling uncontrollably. Bev squealed but mostly just looked shocked.

“For a moment there I really thought we were gonna have to hide in the toilets for the rest of this year.” Ben laughed, squeezing Bev’s hand. Stan looked over at Bill who didn’t seem too fazed by this, but still looked a tad distant.

“I’d like to thank all the other candidates for applying and just giving it a go! You’re all very brave for standing up in front of the whole school, so I congratulate you.” Mrs Wilson nodded appreciatively towards them. “Dismissed!”

And now they were prancing across the field, elated with happiness. Eddie even got up onto Richie’s shoulders, tackling Bev who was also balancing on Bill’s. Mike was chasing Ben around with a stick and Stan hopped on Ben’s back to slow him down.

“Jesus no wonder you wanna join track team! You’re still running even with Stan on your back!” Bev shouted as Ben, who had slowed down a little but hadn’t lost momentum, sped past.

“Hey what’s that supposed to mean!” Stan yelled back, laughing so hard he almost fell off of Ben’s back.

“It means that your bees nest of a hair cut is weighing you down.” A menacing tone cut through their happiness and stomped on it with their hooves. Ben dropped Stan, who was self consciously tucking his hair behind his ears.

“Hey Henry, take your little pity party somewhere else.” Richie gently lifted Eddie off his shoulders and onto the floor.

“Or what?” Henry raised his eyebrows expectantly.

“Or your face is gonna meet my fists.” Eddie spat.

“You really think I’m scared of your fruity little fists?” Henry laughed

long and loudly.

“Hey, you better watch it.” Mike said coldly, the vein in his neck bulging in mild anger.

“I don’t know if you’ve realised, but you didn’t win. So you can’t do anything to us, and if you do we’ll make no hesitation on taking a delightful trip to Mrs Wilson’s office.” Bev scowled, Bill linking his hand with hers.

“What’s she gonna do? Give me a detention for a day?” Henry chuckled again.

“This isn’t our old school, Henry.” Bev stated.

“Unlike them, the teachers here actually care.” Eddie nodded.

“Well most.” Stan pointed out, wishing he’d kept his mouth shut.

“We’ll see about that.” And with that, Henry began strolling off. “Oh and Marsh? I see you’ve grown your hair out, guess your dad can’t get to you out here huh.”

Beverly recoiled slightly and in that moment Stan wanted to march over to Henry and shove him down that very convenient cliff.

It seemed Ben wanted to do the same. “Go to hell!” Ben shouted, his face turning to a not too dissimilar shade of scarlet.

“Not if you go first!” Henry replied and he rounded the corner.

After a while, Richie spoke up. “Give me a stick.”

“A stick? Why do you need a-“

“So I can shove it right up his ass.” Richie cut Eddie off, his face still filled with rage under his glasses.

“Now now, that’s for later on.” Bev smiled coyly. “For now we play his game, and then we’ll introduce him to our own.”

“What’s that?” Mike looked at her uncertainly.

Her face hardened and Stan saw that flicker of light return to not just her eyes, but igniting her entire face.

“Revenge.”

Bill Denbrough, in the drama hall at the end of lunch

“My v-v-voice can’t g-go hu-hu-higher than t-t-that.”

“It can and it will.” Greta said, her honey blonde hair up in a messy bun that Bill honestly thought looked like noodles.

“I don’t see why you’re in charge anyway.” Audra said, left arm on her hip. “Shouldn’t it be, like, me and Bill?”

“Chloe said I was head of dancing.” Greta said, her nose in the air.

“Yeah, not singing.” Audra said.

“Come on, guys.” Alison moaned. She had a stack of scripts under her left arm and was looking like she wouldn’t mind a trip off the cliff that Whitemore stood on. “Can’t we just rehearse the song and come to the rest later?”

Bill sighed and got ready to hit Danny’s high notes. It was the end of lunch, and him and Audra were going over their big numbers. Chloe had extra lacrosse or something of that sort, so she left the rest of the lacrosse team in charge, which may not of been her brightest idea.

“Okay, from the top.” Greta yelled to the almost completely empty stage.

Alison rolled her eyes and pressed down on the stereo. The opening notes of ‘Sandie’ started to play, and Bill took a breath.

“Stranded at the drive in,
Branded a fool,
What will they say Monday at school?”

He sung the words with no problem, finding them coming out of his mouth easily. His didn’t feel awkward, as some did when rehearsing.

Actually, he felt confident. Singing was one thing he could do without the burden of stuttering, and he sure as hell was going to do it well.

“Now, High!” Greta shouted, when Bill had to hit the highest part in the song.

‘Oh why-uy-uy-uy’

Greta and Alison clapped and Bill finished there.

“Hu-hu-high enough f-for you?” He asked, though he was grinning.

“That was really, really good.” Greta said, coming over with her clipboard (Bill noticed how she had stuck pencils through her top bun) and started to scribble something down. “Now, can you do that while dancing!”

“I thought you do brilliantly.” Audra said in her deep voice, smiling up warmly at Bill.

“S-says you.” Bill said. He had heard her perform the end of ‘Hopelessly devoted’ and he fully believed he was dreaming for a good three seconds.

“We have everything we need to win.” Alison said, smiling bashfully. “I just wished we knew what South and West were putting on.”

“Nothing as good as this.” A voice from the doorway said, and Bill turned to see Sandie walking in. “Bill, I never knew your voice could go so high!”

Bill smiled as Sandie made her way to the stage. In the past few weeks, Sandie had slotted in like a coin to an arcade machine. She was now a familiar face in the common room and classes and though Bill didn’t know her as well as Emily or Chloe, she was pretty open.

“What are South and East doing?” Alison pressed as Sandie sat down on the side of the stage and swung herself up.

“You know that new Mary Poppins musical that came out over the summer?” Sandie asked. She was looking at them with no caution

that was formerly there.

“Oh, yeah.” Audra said. “Me and my folks went to see it.”

“Well, they chose that.” Sandie said.

“O-oh.” Bill said, not sure how to take this information.

“It’s a lot more morden an than Grease.” Audra said after a brief pause. “But it hasn’t got the same atmosphere Grease has.”

“Yeah.” Sandie agreed, her arms crossed. “They were struggling with that, too. No other source materials for the scripts or songs or anything. And it was hard to even out the casting.”

Greta put her hand up for a high five, for rejected, and then clapped it herself. “Guess who’s in the lead now?” She said, smiling with her teeth.

“We’re gonna winnnnnnn!” Alison sung, doing a weird hopping thing she sometimes did when she was excited.

Sandie smiled in half amusement. “They may of changed it for all I know but I don’t think they were planning to.”

Bill smiled down at Audra and she smiled back and for one short, odd second, his heart did a little leap.

But he brushed that off as them having a head start.

“Okay, okay, from the top!” Greta said, still grinning manically.

Bill opened his mouth and began to sing.

Eddie Kaspbrak, in the Commin Room

Above all, Eddie was a little bit shell shocked himself.

He knew he had a soft spot for cycling and all, especially at home, but he didn’t realise he liked it this much... as a sport. For someone who hated every ounce of Pe no matter what was happening, he was

surprisingly enthusiastic about it.

“I just wish we did it more often.” Eddie sighed, rolling his head back on the sofa.

“Wait... what?” Stan shook his head in disbelief.

“What?” Eddie looked up, slightly oblivious.

“Did you just wish for... more Pe lessons?” Stan cupped his ears dramatically.

“Well I never.” Mike laughed, sliding ever so slightly down the leather sofa.

“I gotta admit, you are pretty good at it.” Bev said, who was lying flat against the common room carpet.

“I think there is a way you can do more actually,” Ben said thoughtfully. Eddie perked up. “I mean, it’s Whitemore, they have a club for just about everything.”

“S-s-surprised they h-h-huh-haven’t opened a s-singing club to be honest.” Bill said flatly.

“Why, you wanna join one Billy?” Richie smirked. “Wanna impress the girls?”

“Beep beep Rich, he already has one.” Bev grinned up at Richie, who winked at her.

“Well, where do you sign up for these things?” Eddie brought the conversation back on track before it turned down a dark alley.

“Just by the field and then on the wall after you turn right.” Mike replied.

“But you might wanna be quick since the dinner bell is gonna ring soon.” Ben looked down at his watch.

Eddie nodded and stood up. “Got it.” And with that, he stepped over Bev and walked to the door.

“Hey Eds, wait up!” The unmistakeable voice of Richie Tozier floated down the hallway after him.

“Don’t call me that.” Eddie retorted automatically, barely registering the sentence other than hearing ‘Eds’.

“Whatever you want, spaghetti.” Richie caught up with him, slinging an arm around his shoulder.

“What brings you here anyway, Trashmouth.” Eddie said, manoeuvring Richie’s arm off him so he could walk down the stairs without tripping and dying.

“It’s getting dark out, didn’t want my little Eds getting lost out there by yourself.” Richie shrugged.

“It’s school, I’m not gonna get lost. And besides, I can fend for myself you know.” Eddie peered up at Richie.

“I know, but it was the best reason I could give for me to hang out with you without you drowning me.” Richie said, almost too quickly to be understood. Realising so, Richie grinned. “Imagine Bill trying to say that sentence.”

Eddie snorted and playfully shoved Richie. “You are so mean! You know that right?”

“Mean? Me? Never! Just telling it as it is.” Richie opened the back door for Eddie and let him walk through it.

“That certainly is one of your specialties.” Eddie let himself smile, watching as a puff of steam came from his mouth. Eddie wrapped his arms around himself as he once again regretted not throwing a jumper on. This time when Richie, more gently, put his arm around Eddie’s shoulder he let it lay there. Mostly because it was warm and Eddie quite literally thought it was minus a hundred degrees, but also because it was quite...comfortable. Like it fit there as if it were meant to. As if it were a jigsaw piece finding its way into the puzzle.

But Eddie didn’t dwell on it too long, since the cold was freezing his brain up and messing around with it.

“Hey um,” Eddie slowly recounted what Bev had said earlier. “How was your summer then, we never got to really talk huh.”

Richie took his hands away and shoved them in his pockets. His expression now a little closed off, no jolly demeanour it usually had. “It was fine. Good even. I wish you could say the same about yours.”

“Eh. It’s ok, besides I guess my home is what got me into cycling.” Eddie shrugged, not letting a single thought of his mother into his brain.

“Not for the right reasons though.” Richie shook his head.

They were quiet for a while, rounding the corner of which Mike told them to.

“Jesus they really do have a club for everything.” Richie chuckled. “They even have a fucking story telling club.”

Eddie laughed, scanning the board for any cycling clubs. “Ah, there it is.” He pointed up to the very top of the board. He grabbed a pen and reached as high as he could, barely reaching the bottom of the sheet. Unimpressed, Eddie tried again, feeling the burn of Richie’s eyes on his back. “Don’t say anything or i’ll break your wrists.”

Eddie turned around to see Richie smirking, immediately coughing once he saw Eddie. “Oh Jesus.” Eddie groaned, debating to rip the sheet down or his other option. He shook his head. “Give me a boost.”

Richie smiled again and walked towards him, wrapping his arms around Eddie’s waist.

“You know, for someone who has such a big gob, you are maddeningly quiet.” Eddie remarked.

“You told me not to speak, Eds.” Richie tightened his grip gently and hauled him upwards easily.

“Yeah well you never usually listen.” Eddie took the pen again and wrote his name down as neatly as he could, considering he was barely balancing in a certain Richie Tozier’s arms. Once Eddie had

written it, Richie set him down again.

“There. Good thing I came now wasn’t it.” Richie said smugly.

“You have three seconds to hide your wrists.”

“You have three seconds to get them.”

And before they knew it, Eddie was tackling Richie around, Richie speeding off out of his reach. He held his arms up high, Eddie jumping to reach them. Eddie ran behind Richie and jumped on his back, Richie twisting around in circles wildly to get him off, though he wasn’t trying hard.

Eddie gave in and jumped off, dizzy from the spinning. He sat down on the cold, wet grass, regretting it instantly and standing up again. “Nooo! My ass is all wet now!”

“Well jeez Eds, no need to get frisky on the first date.” Richie smirked, his cheeks a shade so pink that Eddie thought even flowers couldn’t match it. Eddie, too, felt his cheeks heat up, but he simply blamed it on being out in the cold for too long.

“Come on, we better go in before we catch a cold.” Eddie said. They began to walk back, mildly warm still from running around like maniacs. Every so often their hands would brush.

“Jesus Christ Eds your hands are colder than our dorm in the winter! Look at them, they’re blue!” Richie exclaimed. He took Eddie’s hand and blew hot air into it, then holding it in his own. After a minute or so, Eddie looked up at Richie.

“You think my hands are blue? You should see your lips, they’re a shade away from violet.” Eddie said, quickly looking away after realising what trap he’d led himself into.

“What, you wanna warm them up?” Richie raised his eyebrows.

Eddie rolled his eyes, not letting his grin get the better of him. “Beep beep.”

“Woah woah woah! Two beep beeps in one night? That’s got to be

the record this year so far. Here ye here ye! Edward Spagedward is holding the record so far!” Richie attempted of what Eddie thought was a Scottish accent and he snorted.

“There is gonna be a third in a minute.” Eddie laughed. He let go of Richie’s hand and opened the door for him.

“Why thank you good sir.” Richie smiled, a genuine smile which you could only see if you looked carefully under the mask of his voice. Eddie smiled back.

And without realising this whole time, Eddie had only just noticed his heart had been going ten thousand miles per hour. And now, without really thinking what he was about to do or why he was about to do it, since they were inside and it was now warm; Eddie took Richie’s hand.

Notes for the Chapter:

lets take our shirts off and kiss

9. Act Three, Scene Two: Things Get Moving

Mike Hanlon, in the dining hall

The weeks seemed to be flying now. The preparation suddenly seeming all too real and the date of the show coming all too quickly. But Mike didn't let it worry him. Life's too short to worry.

And now he was sitting with east and north at their usual table in the canteen. Mike found it pretty fun having the task every morning of pulling the closest tables they can get to each other- sometimes the closest being halfway across the hall. You never quite knew what chair you were gonna get or how high or low it would be. One time Bill unknowingly got the short straw and ended up with a grey chair (of which Mike had seen out in the gardeners shed) which sat Bill barely up to the height of the table.

That's what he liked about Whitmore. It was so unexpected that it kept Mike on his toes. It kept everyone on their toes. One minute Mike could be happily sitting around in the common room, listening to the odd Christmas record Richie put on for a laugh, and the next he could be saving a cat from a tree that was about to fall down on the side of the field. You just never knew.

The harsh shushing pulled Mike back to the breakfast table with a start. He looked up and saw Mrs Wilson standing tall at the front of the room.

"Students." She greeted. "I have came here to tell you some news."

"God what did you do this time, Rich?" Bev laughed.

"Oh you know, the usual." Richie shrugged and smirked. "Didn't think it was bad to kiss Eddie's mum goodnight." Eddie flicked his ear. "Ow!"

Mrs Wilson hushed the talk of students and smiled in amusement. "Don't worry, I assure you it's good news. I have given you all permission, since it is a fine day out there, to go to town!" Cheers erupted from the cafeteria and Richie gave Mike a high five. "You

will all have half an hour to get ready and as soon as that half an hour is up you may all leave. Oh and remember you theatre kids have a budget of buying things for your play of £100 pounds. Whatever you pay of your money shall be refunded by that." She nodded and then left the room and the hall was once again drowned in happy chatter.

"Guys this is perfect!" Chloe said excitedly. "Now that we're going to town we can finally get props and stuff!"

Mike rested his case. Whitemore was extremely abrupt. But he wasn't complaining one bit, Chloe was right. Now they could really get the play rolling.

"This is great and all but, what if a hundred pounds is too little for everything we need?" Ben asked.

"Then we make more." Richie replied simply.

"How?" Stan stared at him in disbelief.

"Well I did see a printer in Matron's room, I'm sure it's not that illegal." Richie shrugged.

"Y-y-yeah, how hard c-c-cuh-c-can it be?" Bill agreed.

"Jesus Christ." Mike snorted. "Do y'all actually have any brains in there of have I been mistaken?"

Richie knocked on his head, making a hollow sound somehow. "You tell me."

"Let me answer that, you don't." Buffy said, making them all laugh.

And with that, they gobbled up the rest of their breakfasts and sped upstairs, retrieving their money as fast as they could.

"Where the FUCK is my wallet?" Eddie yelled suddenly, making them all jump helplessly. "If I've lost it I swear I'm gonna break the person who is stood closest to me's neck— oh, I found it."

Ben stepped back.

Once they had got everything, spare bags and all, they made their way down stairs and met with ease.

“Y’all ready?” Sandie said cheerfully, smiling around the lot and seeming to be stopping at Ben. Mike raised his eyebrows at him and Ben shook his head with an unmistakable grin on his face.

Once they were on their way to the gate Mike walked up to Ben. “Something you’re not telling me?” He teased, not really expecting an answer. If it was personal, he was fine with that. If Mike had learnt anything, it was to let people be and let them come to you.

“Only that you’re wearing odd socks.” Ben nudged him.

Mike looked down. “Huh, so I am.” He chuckled and dropped the subject.

They’d reached the gate and Chloe stopped them all. “Right, how are we doing this.”

“W-w-we’ll have to s-sp-spl-s-s-sp-s-spli-s-“

“Split off? I agree.” Audra finished Bill’s sentence for him and he nodded gratefully.

“I’m just gonna go ahead and do it in the order you’re standing in.” Chloe said. “Ok Emily and Buffy, Blake and Greta,” There was a scoff and an eye roll. “Eric and Alison, Audra and Patty, Bev and Stan, Mike and Richie, Eddie and Bill, Ben and Sandie and i’ll tag along with Audra and Patty.”

Once they’d all decided what the pairs/ three needed to get, they all split off into different parts of town.

“Right-o Mikey, what were we meant to get again?” Richie scratched his head as they wandered cluelessly down a cobbled street.

“Paint. Where do you think we could buy that?” Mike knitted his eyebrows in thought. Why they didn’t just borrow some from the art room was beyond him. “I mean, surely we could’ve just took some from the art room?”

“Probably got pissed we used it all last year for that fete thing.” Richie said.

“Oh yeah, almost forgot about that.” Mike recalled wistfully, remembering all the laughter and preparation and just how well it all went. “Seems like ages ago.”

“Time can be funny like that sometimes, old chap.” Richie patted Mike’s shoulder. “You’re neither hith nor dither.”

“Is there even a language for that word?” Mike laughed, shaking his head.

“Dunno, I should probably stop listening to other people’s conversations. Especially in town.” Richie replied. “I heard one time that this woman was trying to get with her boyfriends son.”

Mike groaned. “Beep beep Richard.” They rounded a corner.

Richie gasped.

“What? Do you see paint? A dying animal? A dying sheep?!” Mike fired questions at Richie, looking around wildly.

“What? Dude I was kidding, I’m not actually shocked. You just beep beeped me.” Richie snorted, attempting to put his arms around Mike’s broadened shoulders. “But I’m flattered you think my acting is good.”

“I think you need to get your ears cleared out man,” Mike nudged Richie’s arm off him. “Because I don’t recall those words leaving my mouth.”

“Oh sure ya don’t, honey.” Richie’s voice turned high and they both broke down laughing.

“Anyway paint. That’s what we’re here for. Not walking around aimlessly.” Mike pulled his mind back to focus and looked around. “I just don’t see any paint shops.”

“Well I did see a DIY shop earlier.” Richie dropped in casually.

“What? Where?” Mike asked.

“Just to the right of the gate.” He said.

Mike pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed. “Well why didn’t you say earlier? We wouldn’t have had to walk so far for zero reason.”

Richie shrugged. “Didn’t think they’d sell paint in there.”

“You didn’t think they would—?” Mike propped his head up on Richie’s shoulder in despair. “You know sometimes I think you really don’t have any brain cells up in there at all. Come on let’s go.”

They strode back to where Richie had pointed out the shop and they walked in, the smell engulfing Mike so much he had to take a breather.

“Alright,” Mike walked up to the stacks of paints on the walls. “What colours did they say again?”

“They didn’t.” Richie rolled his head back.

“Ah, well I’m sure we can figure this out.” Mike nodded, trying to convince himself as much as Richie. “Uhh, well Pink Ladies, they’re obviously gonna need something pink so we can get this can.” He picked up a can of paint which was labelled ‘gentle fuchsia’.

“Oh, and we’ll need some red since Rydell High’s colour is red.” Richie nodded, handing Mike another tin. It continued like this until both Mike and Richie’s arms were filled with four cans each.

“Jeez I didn’t realise you were pretty strong.” Mike said to Richie.

“Don’t worry Mikey, not many people do. You see I hide my abs and muscles under my shirts in case everybody gets jealous.” Richie grinned under his glasses and Mike chuckled. He enjoyed conversations with Richie because you never knew what kind of Richie you’d get. Either jokey Richie, of which Mike had the pleasure of enduring today, or serious Richie. Both had their pros and cons but overall, it was contrast to others.

They walked up to the till and messily dropped the tins onto the

counter. The cashier looked at them both with minor disgust but scanned the items anyway.

“Twenty pounds.” He said blandly.

Both Mike and Richie’s jaws dropped. “What?”

“I said, twenty pounds.” He repeated, a scowl on his face.

“Why? How? What— How is it worth that much?” Mike took a can and examined it. “What, is this like gold plated or something?”

“Mike, let me handle this.” Richie touched his shoulder calmly and looked up to the cashier with a smile on his face. Mike knew it all too well but he wasn’t about to interfere.

“Listen,” Richie looked at the man’s name tag. “Rob, I don’t know who the fuck hired you or why they did because you clearly can’t read the price on these things and you clearly can’t see that we are just children.”

“Yeah, children looking for trouble.” Rob growled.

“Children looking for a gift for their mothers. We have little and for whatever reason, God put you on earth to help his land. And by helping his land, you’d be helping us. We barely get enough to eat as it is.” Richie continued with puppy eyes through his thick glasses. Mike found it extremely difficult to keep his mouth a straight line.

“I can clearly see you’re from Whitemore high.” Rob said. “And if you bring religion into this I will not hesitate to call the cops.”

“Oh no, we simply don’t have the money to be at Whitemore. We found these in lost property.” Richie batted his eyes. Mike subtly nudged Richie to indicate that this wasn’t gonna work and they’re gonna be sent to jail. “So look here fucker, if you don’t give us these paints for anything less than six pounds eighty three then we will willingly call the cops on you.”

“Oh yeah? With what phone?” Rob challenged.

Richie looked around and Mike suddenly got an idea. He gasped

loudly making both Rob and Richie to look at him in alarm. "Look! Look um Rob! Someone is in the back of your shop! He was taking uhh, some uhh, copper nails!"

"We don't sell copper nails." Rob frowned.

Shit. "Uhh, d-did I say copper? Ah silly me I meant gold!"

Rob got up off his chair and bolted for the back room cursing wildly. Mike grabbed four of the paint pots, urging Richie to do the same.

"What are you--"

"Just run!" They sprinted chaotically out of the shop and dashed as fast as they could to the other side of town.

"Well Jesus Mike." Richie panted after they'd sat down on a bench, hidden behind a bush.

"Your 'let me handle this' was taking too long." Mike grinned.

"Hey! I had full control over the situation." Richie exclaimed.

"What, by calling him a fucker and threatening to call the police on him for charging us the correct price?" Mike said.

"Yeah well, it gave you time to think of your plan so I think we did pretty well." Richie dropped the paints into Mike's bag.

"That is if he doesn't call Mrs Wilson and tell her what happened." Mike pointed out, suddenly realising the consequences of that happen.

"He doesn't know our names, it's fine Michael. Stop worrying." Richie said.

Mike smiled. Great minds think alike and all that. Above everything, Mike though he and Richie made a pretty good team. Even if it could get them jail. They only had one life and they had to make the most of it.

"Maybe you do have one or two brain cells up there."

“Now, Mikey, you are the jokester.”

Bill Denbrough, in town with Eddie Kaspbrak

Bill and Eddie walked past the delicate shops that Bill always thought looked as though they'd been plucked straight from a postcard.

Eddie was leading the way, as Eddie often did, and Bill was following with a piece of paper scrunched in his right hand. Both of them were wearing coats, and it was a good thing too; the wind had been strong when they'd woken up but now the clouds were a threatening grey and Bill was already anticipating the rainfall that would come. Which was great. Who didn't love getting completely soaked as you went play shopping.

“Which store was it again, Big Bill?” Eddie asked, his voice muffled by his hood which he had drawn tightly around his head.

“G-g-g-g-greta s-ss-s-said w-we c-could j-j-just go t-to B-b-b-b-boots.” Bill replied. The cold was making his stutter worse and he'd almost bit his tongue twice that day.

“Got the list?” Eddie asked for approximately the one millionth time.

“N-n-no, i-it d-d-diss-a-p-p-peared s-since the lu-lu-last t-t-time you ah-asked.” Bill joked as best he could with his stutter as bad as it was that October day.

“It's the next street along.” Eddie said, and shoved his hands into his pockets in a way Bill thought he probably picked up from Richie. “Come on.”

With the final performance coming surprisingly closer, play rehearsals were now in full swing. They had an hour practice each Saturday and sometimes separate people had extras. Being Danny Zuko, Bill had attended five extra rehearsals that week, each being at least two hours. It knocked him out completely, and for once he was glad there were no sleepovers planned. No way would he be able to stay up all night, especially on top of all the school work he was getting. But he didn't mind the extra rehearsals. Actually, he really

liked them. Although his voice was often sore afterwards, he enjoyed singing, especially with Audra. She had a beautiful voice, deep and rich, and it went perfectly with Bill, who's own voice was at a similar pitch.

And hitting Danny's famous high notes was always fun. He found it easier than he thought he would, and the look on people's faces always made him try ten times harder (not because he was self obsessed or anything). It was fun, if exhausting, and Bill couldn't wait for opening night.

But opening night coming closer meant getting the final things ready. Half of North and East had been sent to two to pick up props while the other half made a list of stage lights and furniture they needed to sort out as they looked through shops. Bill and Eddie had been chosen to get the hair supplies, including six bottles of shampoo that Bill suspected would all be charitable donated to Greta's hair. There was also hair dye and even wigs, something him and Eddie would have to collect from a shop Stan had called up yesterday, and Bill was scared for how much would be used on him.

"Here." Eddie said, stopping outside the village's Boots. It looked warm, and Bill was suddenly acutely aware of how bitter the air was outside.

"C-c-c-c-come o-o-on." He said, leading them both in through the glass doors.

It was warmer, and Bill sighed and relaxed his shoulders. Eddie giggled at this, taking his hands out of his pockets.

"You act like an old grandad." He said, and Bill mimed hitting him.

"Okay, okay!" Eddie said, ducking behind him. "What's first on the list?"

Bill opened his hand to reveal the paper ball that had one been an completely flat sheet, and read off, "Huh-huh-hair g-g-g-gel."

"Right." Eddie said, standing on his tip toes to look around. "That would be in the hair section?"

“N-n-no w-way.” Bill said, and Eddie laughed.

They walked towards the back, past makeup and nail polish which Bill passed uninterested and then through the medicine isle.

Eddie immediately stiffened up at this, and Bill nudged his shoulder, making him look up.

“Y-you oh-oh-oh-oh-okay?” He said, already knowing the answer.

“Bad memories.” Was all Eddie said, and Bill walked protectively next to him until they reached the hair part.

“So hair gel.” Eddie perked up, scanning the shelves with a careful consideration. “How much of that will be used on you, do you think?”

“I d-d-d-d-don’t kn-kn-kn-kn-knSHIT!” Bill cried suddenly. Eddie turned and gave him a small, tentative smile.

“Stutter bad today?” He asked gently.

“A r-r-r-r-real s-ss-son o-of a b-b-b-b-bitch.” Bill replied, his throat feeling like a mortar engine.

Eddie nodded carefully and Bill suddenly didn’t want him to try to comfort him. He didn’t want Eddie to tell him that it would all be okay. But mostly, randomly, he didn’t want Eddie to be the bigger person. Not because Eddie couldn’t be the bigger person- on the contrary, he was probably the bravest person Bill had ever met, besides Bev. But because it felt wrong to Bill. Shouldn’t Bill be the one who comforts Eddie? Isn’t that the way it was suppose to be?

But that strange thought vanished, only leaving the flashing reminds of paper boats and late night scrabble and movies with his (brother) parents.

“Have you got any excises that help?” Eddie asked, kneeling in front of Bill.

“Yu-yu-yu-yu-yeah,” Bill said, “I d-d-don’t t-t-t-talk.”

Eddie laughed kindly at this and shook his head. "Bill not talking? Jeez, what would the world have come to?"

It was Bill's turn to laugh this time, and he helped Eddie up.

"So, gel." Eddie said, turning back to the shelf.

“Y-y-y-y-yeah.” Bill said.

“Do you want stiff or extra stiff?”

Bill blinked and then laughed so hard, near by shoppers gave him the 'Can you please shut up and show some Respect' look.

“What?” Eddie said, his face burning bright red.

“E-e-e-e-e-ext-t-t-t-a s-s-s-s-s-st-i-f-ff.” Bill managed through gulps of hysterical laughter.

"It's the brand," Eddie said, half offended and half trying to hide his laughter.

“E-e-e-e-e-e-“

“Eddie.”

Bill sat down on the cold floor, trying to get his laughter under control. But every time he started to calm down just a little, he remembered how matter-of-factly Eddie had said the names and he'd start laughing all over again.

Eddie's face broke after watching Bill absolutely lose it, and he started to laugh too.

“Jeez Bill, it wasn’t that funny.” He said through giggles, sitting next to Bill.

“Y-y-y-y-yeah i-i-it w-w-w-w-was.” Bill said. A single tear was streaming down his face now and he was half laying down on the floor.

"I'm sorry boys, is there a problem here?" A even voice asked, and

Bill looked up through blurry eyes to see a worker standing above them, her too blond hair in a tight bun.

“No.” Eddie said immediately. “My friend just, uh... just found something a bit too funny.”

She raised an eyebrow that looked as if someone had drawn it on with a ruler. “Right.” She said. “Well, if you and your friend don’t get yourselves under control, I’m afraid I’m going to have to ask you to leave.”

Bill watched Eddie nod as she walked off and it took every single ounce of his willpower not to burst out laughing again.

“There, you big doofus,” Eddie said, helping Bill up, “you almost got us kicked out!”

Bill only shook his head and handed Eddie the now half destroyed shopping list.

They went over to the hair dye products next, Bill let out the occasional snort as they tried to find the colours they needed. In the end, they picked the basic blond, black and brown and Eddie grabbed a bottle of ‘Candy-Floss pink’ just in case they couldn’t find a good enough wig for Emily. They also got a pack of hair bands.

“How much do you think this will come to?” Eddie said as the line shuffled closer to the till.

“I-i-i-i-it d-d-d-d-doesn’t l-l-l-oo-look l-like m-m-much.” Bill said. He had an envelope in his pocket with their share of the budget (Mrs Wilson had given both North and East and West and South a reasonable amount to spend on their play, with strict words to not use it on anything else) and he knew Boots weren’t exactly known for ripping people off.

“That was harder than I expected.” Eddie said, brown bag full of hair dye in his arms as him and Bill left the warmth of the shop and went outside.

“I-i-i-i-it w-w-was hu-hu-hu-half y-y-y-your f-f-fault.” Bill replied.

“Aw, Big Bill.” Eddie said, though he was still grinning.

The total had come to six pounds seventeen pence, well in their budget, and Bill suspected the left over money would be spent at the wig place. Eddie led the way, once again, and they made their way down a small street to a thatched store with a display of very large wigs in the window.

“Here.” Eddie said.

Bill pushed the door open with his knee, his hands full of hair supplies, and the two of them walked in.

The shop was uncomfortably drafty but still warmer than outside. There were wooden blocks with head stands, all modelling wigs, and the left wall was covered in oak shelves.

“Hello.” A balding man said from the desk. “How may I help you?”

“Uh, we’ve requested some wigs.” Eddie said, looking at Bill uncertainty.

“Okay,” The man said, leaning under the desk and producing a folder. “Under what name?”

“Uris.” Eddie said.

The man looked down and nodded, making a clicking sound with his tongue. “This way.” He said, leading them to the back of the store.

They needed a pink wig for Frenchie and a blond one for Buffy’s performance as Rizzo. Eddie had noted that they might need three more for the pink ladies but there may be some suitable ones in the drama department already.

“So candyfloss dream.” The man said, pointing to a long, pink wig. “Or bubblegum?” He pointed to a light pink bob.

“The second one.” Bill mouthed at Eddie, not wanting to speak.

“Second.” Eddie nodded at the man.

“Alright.” The man said. “And you also said you needed a blond one over the phone?”

“Yeah.” Eddie said. “It doesn’t need to be special.”

“Browse over there,” the man pointed over to a display of blond wigs, “while I get this bagged for you.”

Eddie thanked the man and him and Bill walked over. They all looked the same really, their shades and tones just differing from each other. It didn’t take long to pick one, and soon the man had bagged them both, reading off the price.

They just had enough, leaving a grand total of three pence for him and Eddie. But they’d bought what they needed to, and with plenty of time to spare.

“That went well.” Eddie said as he stepped out the shop, left foot almost tripping from the drop.

“Y-y-y-y-yep.” Bill agreed.

And it had. Apart from his fucking stupid stutter, they’d done all they needed to do. And, Bill noted as they walked past the shops, he’d had a laugh doing so.

Now the play could really get moving.

Ben Hansom, shopping with Sandie

“I seriously don’t know why they chose me to go find makeup. I know jack shit about it.” Ben said for about the eighth time in five minutes.

“Good thing I’m helping then isn’t it?” Sandie grinned as they walked past a fountain in the middle of the town square. It seemed to be some sort of ancient stature of an angel Ben couldn’t quite pin point. He was sure he’d seen it before but couldn’t remember where.

“I mean, I don’t even know what shops were actually looking for.”

Ben said, bringing out his camera to take a quick snap shot of the fountain.

“Know what angel that is?” Sandie asked, as if she read his thoughts.

Ben looked up and shook his head. “Unfortunately not.”

“It’s the Angel of the North.” Sandie said. “My dad used to tell me about all the angels when I was little. Said that you can identify each one because they each have something different.”

“Like what?” Ben asked, fascinated.

“Well, for this one you can see she has a leaf crown on her head. That’s how you tell it’s North, and for the East, for example, she has a gold bracelet that loops around her arm.” She smiled. “My dad says I look like her.”

“But, I thought angels were all boys? Well that’s what I was told in primary school anyway.” Ben recounted in his Religious Education lessons that he was forced to go to even though he wasn’t at all religious.

“That depends on what you believe.” Sandie replied simply, and looked over to Ben.

Yes, Ben could see that Sandie could look like an angel. With her golden hair and gentle face. Ben could never and will never understand why she was bullied so horribly, when she had the face and voice of an angel.

“Uh, anyway, we should probably continue looking.” Ben stammered, realising he’d been staring for too long. Sandie nodded and took one last look at the angel before walking down the lane with Ben.

“Ooh! In here will be good.” Sandie stopped outside a shop called M.A.C. “It only just opened over the summer actually.”

“I’ll have to take your word for it.” Ben chuckled. They walked in to see girls left right and centre. Some walking around with sticks of black pens with fancy packaging in their hands, some putting bright red paint onto another customers lips, Ben could go on. “Jesus

Christ.”

Sandie laughed and grabbed Ben’s arm. “This way.”

They made their way to the back of the shop which had stacks of pallets on them. “I swear we could’ve just used face paint for this.” Ben shook his head at the variety.

“Sure, but where’s the fun in that?” Sandie grinned and started scanning the trays.

“What is this?” Ben picked up a pink, thick stick and read it. “Lip- lip stick? Couldn’t we use like, I don’t know, some pink pen?”

“If you wanna get skin cancer, sure.” Sandie picked up a few of the pallets.

Ben blinked. “Oh.”

“Which is exactly why they invented makeup. So a woman can feel pretty without getting cancer in the process.” Sandie said.

“How do you know so much about makeup anyway?” Ben said, looking at a picture on the wall which was labelled; ‘don’t miss out on the one and only liquid liner!’.

“Because I’m a girl.” Sandie replied as if that were answer enough.

“Yeah but surely boys know about this stuff too?” Ben said.

“Do you know about makeup?” Sandie stopped and looked at him.

“Well no but—“

“Exactly. Makeup isn’t exactly on a boys top priority list.” She walked to another part of the shop with Ben trailing hopelessly behind her. Ben didn’t know exactly how to answer that so he dropped it.

After a couple more minutes of Sandie going through lip liners Ben spoke up. “I’m sorry I’m not really much help here.”

“Hm?” Sandie hummed, mind focused on the task at hand.

“Well, you know, I just don’t know anything about this and I feel bad for letting you choose everything.” Ben shuffled uncomfortably.

“Well, why don’t you choose some stuff out?” Her tone wasn’t close to being harsh or snappy in fact, it was actually pretty welcoming.

“Seriously?” Ben asked doubtfully.

“You said you felt bad for not helping, so help.” Sandie smiled at him. “Go over there and choose some eye shadows, meet me back here.”

Ben nodded and walked back over to where Sandie has instructed him. He blinked hard and willed his brain to kick start and work. He picked up a bright pink pallet, a purple one, and a blue one, and made his way back.

“How about these?” Ben banded her the three and her smile lit up.

“Perfect! This was exactly what I needed.” She held them up to the light and nodded. “Ok let’s pay.”

They walked up to the counter and dropped various makeup items on it.

“Hello there.” The girl beamed at Sandie, landing a confused look on Ben. Sandie seemed to spot this and stepped up.

“Uhh, we- he was helping me pick out some.” She nodded and the cashier raised her eyebrows with a grin.

“Ahh, picking out makeup for the girlfriend huh?” The cashier went on at Ben and his eyes widened.

“No n-no we aren’t—“

“You two make the cutest couple.” She smiled at them and they both looked down with feverishly red blushes on their faces. “Hey Spencer! Don’t you agree?”

Another girl came strolling over and nodded enthusiastically. “Anyway, that’s eighteen pounds please.”

Ben struggled to keep his gasp in while Sandie handed over a twenty pound note.

“Twenty pounds for six little items of ink?!” Ben whispered manically as they wandered out of the shop.

“I know right? The sale was so good!” Sandie said. Ben stopped beside her and stared disbelievingly at her. She broke down laughing in her angelic way and shook her head. “I’m kidding that was stupidly over priced.”

As they walked back, it was a calm silence. Ben would every so often sneak a look at Sandie while trying not to think of what the cashier had said to them earlier. He was glad Sandie had joined East tower, and now what her dad had been saying was right all along.

Ben really had the Angel of the East as his friend.

Beverly Marsh, shopping with Stan

“Who knew there were so many colours in the world.” Stan said in wonder as they stared at the racks of different coloured material all over the walls.

“Ok but why is there like eight different shades of pink? They all look exactly the same!” Bev groaned, not knowing which pink would best work for the pink ladies’ jackets she would be sewing in a not too distant future.

Stan wasn’t wrong about quite how many coloured materials this shop was selling. Bev saw at least three different tones of turquoise she never knew existed and about twenty different tones of gold. Now they couldn’t just settle with having every colour under the sun, Hell no sir, they had to have matte as well as shiny or smooth as well as rough, which made it all the more difficult for Bev to actually comprehend what she was staring at.

“Ok right let’s think, we know we need pink for a fact, obviously, and we know we need black for the thunder birds.” Stan said, Bev almost hearing his mind buzzing away as it always did when he was

thinking logically. Whether it was for a math equation or, in this situation, trying to remember all the characters outfits for an entire show, it always worked the same.

Bev always thought that Stan was the brains of the losers, and sometimes he was, if we're talking actual school stuff, but other times when he and the losers club are all together and doing whatever stupid shit they usually get up to, it's like the word 'brain' didn't exist. They all shared one cell and at least half of that cell would go to Mike.

"That's all well and good but when there are about fifty million pinks I'm finding it particularly difficult." Bev craned her neck, her vision going blurry with colour.

"Hmm." Stan hummed, still thinking manically. "Well, lets just look around the shop and see if they have any colour samples."

Bev nodded, thankful that she could peel her eyes away from the colour splat across the whole damn wall.

They walked to another wall, this time with small versions of the materials they'd just been looking at a second ago. It contained mini cut off rectangles, samples you could just apparently take for free.

"Hey if we get enough of these, then we wouldn't have to pay anything." Bev said quietly, joking of course but part of her knew that she was full well up to doing that.

"Maybe for accessories." Stan shrugged, a knowing glint in his eyes. Bev peeped behind her shoulder and quickly stuffed a few random colours of free samples into her pockets. "Right anyway, so we need red for the cheerleader skirts, but not a lot of that, and shiny black for Sandy's outfit at the end." Stan said strolling back to the wall with Bev behind him.

"Why this type of black is called Nether Aubergine will forever be beyond me." Bev shook her head in mild disbelief.

"Probably got bored of calling it Shiny Black." Stan unraveled some of the material off the stand and got some nearby scissors to cut it.

“Wouldn’t sell as well.”

“What and calling it a vegetable nobody likes will?” Bev laughed.

“I like aubergine.” Stan protested, now collecting some red material Bev didn’t even know how to pronounce.

“Let me rephrase that, a vegetable normal people don’t like.” Bev corrected herself.

“Hey!” Stan nudged her playfully. Once Bev actually begun to help Stan get a shit load of materials, he told her to wait for him at the till while he ‘borrowed’ some more samples.

“Jesus I know I said we could use some but I didn’t mean for an entire dress.” She snorted, walking up to the cashier and dropping all the contents that was loaded up in her arms. The guy looked at her. She stared back. Bev guessed he was around a fifth formers age, maybe a year older, which meant he still would probably get a boner at any girl that happened to look at him in the eyes. She raised her eyebrows. “Got a problem?”

“No. No no. Just thinking.” He grinned at her, weighing the cloths for their price.

“Hope it’s about something you’re willing to share with your mother.” Bev said under her breath and looked over subtly to Stan to see what was taking so damn long.

“Thinkin’ about how I hoped these clothes weren’t for you.” He ignored her. “Way too much material.”

She recoiled a bit, feeling a tad uncomfortable, but she wasn’t about to show him that.

“And here I was just thinking about how you aren’t wearing enough.” She said sweetly. He frowned. Bev looked back over to Stan and attempted a mental message of ‘get your ass over here!’.

“Listen, I don’t know who you’re trying to fool, but it’s obvious you want me.” He said quietly.

Bev was taken back. “Sorry?”

He started to make his way slowly around the counter to get closer to Bev. “Leave that little boy and come with me. Can’t let a pretty girl like you go to waste.”

She frowned and began to back away to the door, really wondering how Stan had been so engrossed in his free samples and not hear a single word of what was going on.

“What are you— stop!” Bev shoved his hand back which seemed to make him even more angry, and apparently horny.

“What are you gonna do? It’s your word against mine.” He laughed menacingly, sending shivers down her spine. “Who are gonna tell?”

The next thing Bev knew was Stan swinging something she couldn’t quite identify in that moment and hit the guy around the head, knocking him down on the floor with a groan. “Me!” He yelled at him, threw a twenty pound note on the counter and piled up all the materials in his arms. He pushed Bev out the door and shouted at him, “Keep the damn change you shit head!”

“Jesus Christ—“ Bev barely grasped from having the wind knocked out of her.

“That’s the last time we ever go in that shit hole.” Stan stated and left it at that.

In that moment, Beverly Marsh loved Stan Uris. Yes, he could be, apparently, be distracted easily with free samples, but he’d always be there. No matter how much he claimed to hate everyone, of which Bev knew he knew was a complete and utter lie, he’d always pull through for them. No she didn’t love him in the way you’d wanna go out with him, but in the way that she knew if she ever lost him or if they ever drifted; a part of her heart would drift too.

Which is why Bev made a mental vow that they’d never, ever, drift.

Not any of them.

Richie Tozier, walking back to Whitmore

The sun was now an orange glow, bleeding into the sea as the Saturday drew to a close. The bitter day was now a cool evening. Shops were beginning to close up, the owners turning the 'Open' signs to 'Closed' and locking up for the night.

North and East headed up the familiar path to Whitmore, a silhouetted castle against the watercolored sky, the four towers looking like something plucked straight from a toddlers picture book.

Richie himself was walking with the losers, the seven of them in a line and spilling over the cobble path. Everyone was exhausted, all talking in low voices. Their curfew was in just under a hour, and after raiding the town for play supplies, Richie felt ready to go back to the common room, with its stone fireplace radiating heat and the sofas over spilling with cushions.

The night reminded him of when him and Conor would meet up over the summer, a bit away from their suburbs. They'd meet late evening because Conor normally went out with his family (they want to explore the whole of America Rich, I swear) and the only chance they really had to talk was then.

Richie had been thinking a lot of Conor recently. Not in a missing, romantic kind of way. More so in a slightly confused, slightly ashamed sort of way. He was guilty about his feelings towards boys, and he supposed he would always feel that way. The world wanted him to feel that way. But it wasn't just that he felt bad about. He felt guilty also because he hadn't told the losers. It felt like he was hiding something big, something life changing from them. And that made him feel bad.

It wasn't as if him and Conor had had a Thing. The closest they ever got was some close moments. No, they hadn't dated or anything official. And honestly, Richie hadn't felt anything for Conor, though it was obvious that Conor felt something for Richie. But he'd helped Richie. Within those hot evenings, Conor had taught Richie to accept himself from a perspective Richie never thought he would see.

He knew Eddie, of course, but Eddie sometimes felt like a dream, and to meet someone else who could be like him felt wonderfully

pureafullyimsgbja. It gave him a whisper of hope.

But something else came along with that, something odd. Richie was now acutely aware that he was young. Youngest he'd ever be. And Corner's voice would echo through his head sometimes, when it was especially hot in class, or he was struggling to sleep because his brain was on overrun and he'd think over the day start from finish to try and get himself to sleep.

"Youth is the best thing about life, Richie. You never see the world again like you did when you were a child. So don't fucking waste it."

Was he wasting his life, by keeping such a big part of himself hidden. There were only two people who really knew, and despite everything he'd been told, he still felt a kind of hatred for himself sometimes. Would that stick with him? Would it ware his youth away?

"and th-th-then t-t-this l-l-lady c-c-c-c-came and a-a-almost k-k-kicked u-us o-o-o-o-out!" Bill said, talking loudly despite all other 16 students being quiet.

The loudness of Bill Denbrough's voice made Richie's thoughts easy to ignore, and he happily let them slip away into the cracks of his brain.

"It was an honest mistake." Eddie said, watching his keds track against the ground. "Besides, what asshole names their brand that and doesn't have any second thoughts?"

"It is pretty funny." Ben said. "Extra stiff-"

Eddie whacked Ben's arm, and Ben laughed harder.

"Eddie spaghetti gets off a good one." Richie said almost absent mindly, looking at the cluster of stars in the sky.

"Eddie Spaghetti is about to punch a certain Richie Tozier." Eddie said sharply, and Richie's attention broke as he turned towards Eddie and grinned in the calm night. It was a childish grin, a grin that showed youth, a grin that showed the beautiful naivety of a kid.

Richie suddenly wondered how different life would be in a few years.

If him and Eddie would still bicker back and forth like they were now, or if it was just because they were young, and they got an excuse to be loud and rude (except they weren't really rude, were they?) and careless. Maybe that was a terrible side affect that came with growing old; maturity. Maturity that meant no more calling your best friend Spaghetti, maturity that meant being quiet in serious moments, maturity that meant sucking the fun and light out of situations.

And randomly, desperately, Richie realised that he really didn't want to grow old at all. Not if it meant things changing. To be a child, that alone was a blessing.

"Okay, okay boys!" Bev said, holding up her hands in a police offer way. "No violence on the streets!"

The grave thoughts that had rushing through Richie's mind disappeared almost completely at Bev's playing tone, and were replaced with his selection of voices fit for the moment.

"He called me spaghetti, I believe that's hate crime." Eddie reported to her.

"And I sa' this chaump threatened to kull me!" Richie said, joining in with their gag.

"Mmm." Bev said, stroking her chin as if deep in thought. "Well, I think this matter will have to be taken to court."

"Judge Ben at your service." Ben said, giving a mini salute to Bev.

"Judge Ben, which young man should we keep under lock and key?"

"Both." Stan said, his hair sWiNgInG. "For taking away my will to live."

"Betrayal!" Richie cried, and Bill all but jumped forward.

"I hereby back up my client, Richard Toaster."

He said all of this in a deep, authoritative voice that Richie thought probably sounded similar to Zack Denbrough, and his stutter, which

had been bad all day, vanished into the night like a flock of gulls. Away, away, away.

“Then I shall back up Edward Kaspbrak.” Mike said, running behind Eddie and placing his hands on his shoulder.

“Court in now in action!” Ben cried loudly, and everyone walking in front of them turned to give them a long hard stare.

The Losers waited until the last, lingering faces had turned back and then burst out in laughter, laughter that was the sound of youth, laughter that travelled through the trees and up the mountains and out into the neverending sky. Maybe it would last there forever, that sound of seven children on a chilly October night. Maybe it would live in the sky, in the stars, burning there. Maybe all youth lasts forever, if it's in the sparkle of an old person's eyes or the old sports equipment stacked up in an attic, collecting dust. Maybe youth just is, like maturity just is. Maybe...

“You doing okay, Rich?” Mike asked from behind him.

“Sure am.” Richie said in one of his okay Voices, one he uses a lot more than he'd ever admit. “Just thinking hard.”

“About what?” Stan asked causally.

Richie shrugged, feeling stupid for thinking so hard about growing up. “Just... the play.”

Stan made an agreeing noise and Mike nodded. “It's getting scarily close, isn't it?”

Stan agreed and they started talking about all the stuff that still needed to be done. Only Eddie was looking at Richie with mild sadness and curiosity. His look carried so much strength, so much of something else, that Richie looked away almost as soon as he locked eyes with Eddie.

“We still have a few things to do.” Audra said as they reached the grand doors to Whitmore.

“Too shay.” Ben said, doing a weird side step dance on the mat to

wipe his boots.

"We should do inventory now," Eric said, "while we still have the shopping on us."

"Is that where you store bread?" Emily asked with a serious kind of curiosity, and Richie felt himself smile at her genuine confusion.

"No," Eric said, not mocking Emily (none of them did, not even Blake or Greta, who could be harsh to the kindest of people), "it's basically what someone has on them."

"So if someone could write down everything we have prop wise and how many of each, that would be a big help." Chloe said, leaning on Eric as she took her shoes off.

"Why can't you?" Richie asked.

"Because we have Lacrosse practice." Alison said, already pulling her strawberry blond hair into a ponytail.

"Right, yeah." Mike said, looking around as if his trainers would suddenly appear for him to change into.

"Why don't you make yourself useful and do it?" Greta asked to anyone within a ten meter radius of her as she put her hair up in an immaculate top bun.

"I'll do it." Bev said.

"Me too." Richie said.

"Me three." Eddie added.

"Okay then." Eric said. We have all the records of the play in the second shelf down in the common room, behind 'how to kill a mocking bird'. There's lined paper there. Use that and put it in the official play folder."

"Auy auy, captain!" Richie said, and Bev and Eddie gave each other salutes before breaking down into giggles.

“Good luck.” Mike said, leaving with the rest of the lacrosse team to get changed.

Stan ended up going with Mike and the rest of the lacrosse team, bundled up in his and Mike’s coats. The rest of North and East went up the common room, Bill and Ben talking about trying to make paper airplanes that could carry them to the pool. Emily was distantly talking about going over summer loving and needing to perfect her Frenchie voice and Buffy was asking if anyone had a spear cigarette.

Richie, Eddie and Bev followed them to the common room. A few weeks ago, North and East had started to hide all their play planning on a large file folder. Mike, who could do beautiful writing, had disguised it as a novel and they’d wedge it in between other books. Richie found it where Eric had said it was and took it out.

It was a folder with masses of paper inside, the white stained with the purple ink of 17 different children’s writing, some small and neat, others large with Y’s and G’s that looped spectacularly.

“Come on,” Bev said, slotting the book back into the shelf. “Let’s go.”

“Where to?” Richie asked, shutting the binder.

“Dorm?” Eddie said. “We won’t be disturbed there.”

They agreed and, carrying backs of play supplies that seemed to weigh a tone, they went up to North’s Dormitory, Bev opening the doors by giving them sharp kicks.

They dropped the stuff as soon as the door shut behind them, the bags dropping like apples falling off trees.

Richie threw himself onto a bed and sighed loudly. The day and his thoughts were wearing him down considerably and his chest felt like an anchor in his body.

“You ready?” Bev asked, looking flushed and unbelievably beautiful.

“Yep.” Eddie said, sitting crossed legged on the floor and emptying a bag in front of him. “Let’s go.”

The made a small circle and noted down their possessions in dark ink, scribbling the number next to them. They hummed songs as they worked and Richie felt his hands moving almost automatically, counting then writing, counting then writing, counting then writing.

“You know, feeling isn’t a bad thing.” Eddie said to him twenty minutes in as Bev hummed a light love song.

“Huh?” Richie asked, looking up from his sheet of lined paper.

“Earlier,” Eddie clarified. “Mike asked what you were thinking off and you said it was the play but I don’t think it was.”

Richie opened his mouth to reply but found he couldn’t. Eddie knew, somehow, that Richie wasn’t being entirely honest. How? And why? Why did Eddie care? And why should it matter anyway. His feelings and thoughts were stupid, a waste of time. Why should he bother people with them?

“Richie, you don’t have to tell me.” Eddie said. “But just know that... that you can. If you want.”

Richie nodded, his throat feeling too dry to talk. Eddie smiled warmly at him then went back counting up jumpsuits.

Richie looked down at his paper, hardly taking it in.

Why did Eddie care about what Richie was feeling? Why should he bother himself over it.

And why did Richie now want to tell Eddie everything about Conor?

10. Act Three, Scene Three; Bike rides and pink jackets

Notes for the Chapter:

me and Alice have just watched IT chapter two so now we're ignoring canon more than ever

Ben Hansom, in Art Class

For some unexplained reason, the air conditioning in the Art room was on at full blast despite it being very obviously cold outside.

Ben was trying at his earnest to quietly wrap his coat around his broad shoulders, wrapping it around himself like a dog with its blanket. He was beginning to regret picking electric blue.

Their Art lessons were normally very cool. Their teacher, Mrs Primrose, always had the windows flown open and wore flowy dresses with her chestnut hair in a lose ponytail.

The only logical explanation was that she was immune to hyperthermia.

But apart from the fact that the board was practically frozen to the wall, Ben liked the Art classroom. It was large, but that was common for Whitmore. The walls had actually been painted on, with delicate flowers and animals, all their colours bleeding into each other. Canvases were placed at random points in the room, reminding Ben of the random splatters of paint on paper and the windows towered up, with seats for people to sit at.

Unlike First Year, their teacher had devised a seating plan. Lucky for Ben, he had been seated next to Eddie, which meant Art was never really boring. They'd talk and talk and talk and on more than once occasion, had been threatened to be sent out for being loud.

A year ago, Ben might of just wet his pants at the aspect of being sent out, but now it only made it harder to not laugh.

Their task currently was to practice watercolour toning. They were all working up towards their end of year project, a big painting of

whatever outside landscape they chose, and Mrs Primrose had them doing small tasks each lesson leading up to it.

“I think I’ve done this wrong.” Eddie said uncertainty.

Ben looked over at Eddie’s work and saw different colours blooped over his piece.

“How so?” Ben asked.

“They’re not blending.” Eddie said. “Their meant to all go into one colour or something but mine just looks rainbow puke.”

“It’s nice rainbow puke though.” Ben said.

He himself wasn’t an absolute art genius, but he could sketch quite well. Diagrams and pencil drawings of places were right in his court. Painting, however, was something he found a lot harder.

“They won’t runnnnn.” Eddie said, going over the colours with a wet paint brush.

“Drowning it won’t help.” Ben said. He checked Eddie’s paint pallet. “Did you add enough water to the paint?”

“Any more and they’d be transparent.” Eddie said. He flopped back on his chair, almost fell off, and sighed.

Ben ran a colour smudged hand through his honey coloured hair and looked at everyone else’s once blank paper.

Some were good, others weren’t.

Mike’s looked beautiful despite it only being a simple task, the bright colours he’d chosen spilling into each other to create thousands of stories. Similarly, Stan’s one was somehow impeccably neat, rulers and measures made with each stroke of pink or orange.

Richie’s, on the opposite, was a Mess. Ben didn’t think he’d even attempted blending the colours and had just poured paint from the top of the canvas until it collected at the bottom. Bill’s was also a Mess but this was mostly from the fact Bill had forgotten to add any

water to the watercolours. He still looked proud, though.

He looked at Sandie's last, like how you would look at the sun. Her hair was cascading over her shoulders like a waterfall of sunshine and her whole posture seemed confident and smart and so many other words that danced on the tip of Ben's mouth.

He supposed he was falling for her.

He wasn't sure if he minded or not. She was sweet and kind to him and they got along well. But at the same time, love could never be well.

It could start well or end well or be well somewhere along the line. But love couldn't be well all the time. Love could never be simple all the time, either.

But watching her hold the paint brush move over her paper, Ben thinks he can handle it.

"Ben?" Eddie asked.

"Huh?" Ben said, realising he'd dozed off into the flower scented daydream of crushes and feelings and things all too giddy to explain.

"Can I borrow some of your paints?" Eddie asked.

"Course." Ben said, and pushed the pallet towards Eddie.

Eddie scanned it, his eyes creased with the tug of worries. Ben suddenly realised that it wasn't just the paints inability to blend that was making Eddie frustrated. There was another anchor weighing on him, another thing that was beyond the notice of people but just there for friends.

"Is something up?" Ben asked, shuffling closer to Eddie.

"No." Eddie said.

“Well okay, yes, but like it isn’t even a big big something just more like a something that’s like kinda big but shouldn’t be big and it’s actually really stupid but it won’t go anyway and I’m pretty sure the universe is trying to tell me something-“

“Slow down!” Ben said, hoping that Eddie wasn’t about to pass out.

Eddie stopped and regained his breathing, while Ben flapped his hands about in a way that definitely was not improving anything.

“From the top.” Ben said, wide eyed. “Slower.”

“Okay.” Eddie nodded. “Cycling practice. First one. Scary.”

“Yes.” Ben said, stringing unspoken words together.

“I’ve never been apart of a club before.” Eddie said, drumming his paint brush on the table and leaving little green marks.

“It’s just like a big party but calm.” Ben said.

“What club were you in? You were in a club?” Eddie said.

“Yep.” Ben said. “Proud member of the yo yo club.”

“Ah.” Eddie said, nodding. “But older people could join this and then they’d make fun of me because I’d be smaller and what if, oh God Ben, what if First Years join and they’re taller than me?? Oh shit I think I’d die-“

“No ones dying.” Ben said frantically. “They’ll separate you into years anyway. That’s what happened for Stan and Mike.”

Eddie sighed and his whole body seemed to deflate like a large balloon. Ben smiled and patted him on the back.

“I’ll come with you, if you want.” He offered.

“Really?” Eddie asked.

“Sure.” Ben said. “Besides, I was thinking about checking the bikes

out anyway. We may be able to use them for our play in some way.”

“Okay...” Eddie said. He smiled, and jumped up a little in his chair. “Okay!”

“Okay!”

“Okay!”

“Boys!” Mrs Primrose’s voice travelled across the classroom, sharp and loud. “What’s so funny?”

Ben honestly thought him and Eddie could look at each other and she’d get pissed.

“Nothing.” Eddie said, tapping his foot.

“It didn’t look like nothing.” She said, but dropped it anyway.

Ben smiled at Eddie again and continued to paint. He could see Sandie’s hair and see Mike and Stan off to the side and everything felt so right, so there, that he couldn’t help but grin.

“Bill Denbrough, what in God’s name is this?”

Richie Tozier, in the Drama Hall at break

“Richie I said stand up straighter, not crouch further round until you look like a diseased banana.” Chloe groaned for the third time that rehearsal.

“And I said that’s not how Kenickie would stand!” Richie replied, flicking the page over in his script.

“Ok, sure, but I’m sure matron wouldn’t enjoy seeing you break your back up on stage would she.” Chloe muttered, licking her finger as she, too, turned the page as an eighty year old English teacher would do.

It wasn’t a particular warm October day at Whitemore, as expected.

In fact outside it was pretty chilly, but in the drama hall anyone could be mistaken for it being a late June lunch time. Everybody seemed hot and bothered and seemed to lose their patience as soon as it came.

“Hey is there an air con in this place?” Richie shouted to no one in particular. “It’s fucking boiling up here.”

“Just continue Rich.” Bev fanned herself with her own script.

Richie sighed and readjusted the glasses on his face. “Cheer up,” he said dramatically to Buffy. “A hickey from Kenichie is like a—“

“Wrong page doofus.” Greta rolled her eyes.

“Oh.” Richie frowned and turned back a page. “Right. How ya doin Zuk’—“

“Nope still wrong page, the one after that.” Chloe said. She showed him the page number and he squinted at it, turning the pages rapidly in his script.

“I haven’t got that page number.” Richie frowned deeper, thinking that either his glasses had misted up from the heat or he was out right hallucinating.

“What do you mean you don’t have that page number?” Alison asked in disbelief.

“Hey, wait, which number is it?” Eddie asked, flicking through his the same way.

“Seventy two... why?” Eric said slowly.

“I don’t have it either.” Eddie shook his head and walked up to Richie to compare them.

“I have it?” Sandie said, looking just as confused as everybody else.

A few others claimed they didn’t have those specific pages either, and if Richie wasn’t so goddamned hot and bothered he would’ve noticed that it was only the people who were in that scene who didn’t have

the pages, but he was and he, and the rest of them, regarded it as a printing failure.

“But it can’t be, I read through them all and there was nothing wrong?” Chloe shook her head and sat at the corner of the stage.

“Yeah well clearly not very well.” Greta scoffed and handed Emily her script. “Here, Em, you can use mine.”

Emily took it and swapped them, sharing a confused look with everyone.

“Well, let’s just continue as well as we can.” Mike nodded his head reassuringly and got back to his place on stage.

“J-j-j-juh-just prompt us if w-w-w-we forget.” Bill said and both Alison and Chloe nodded.

They managed to run through the scene as best they could, Richie seeming to get hotter and hotter every minute.

“Jeeeeesus Christ if it’s this hot on show day I’m stapling a cold block to my chest.” Richie jumped out of the seat as soon as the scene was over, questioning as to why the heater had been turned up let alone turned on.

“Don’t dwell on it, it’s probably nothing. Right, Stan your on and Emily go sit in the chair for Beaty School Drop Out.” Chloe instructed and Emily nodded. “Everyone else stand in your usual places.”

Chloe nodded her head at Blake, who was controlling the lights, and the usual bright white beam turned to a rich amber glow you’d see at the end of a sun set just before it dipped below the horizon.

About half way through the song, all was going well and swiftly. Stan was hitting the good old high notes here and there and Sandie and Buffy would often sway past Emily’s seat. This would’ve probably been about the best rehearsal yet when—

“Blake what are you doing?” Chloe rushed over the Blake as the orange light began to dim. “That’s not your cue!”

"I know I'm not doing anything!" Blake held his hands up to show her.

Stan stopped singing and everybody looked up at the main light which was providing them all with a glow. It suddenly turned off and quickly flickered back on, doing the same thing about three times.

"What's... going on?" Bev called from off stage and everybody just shook their heads and shrugged.

It turned on and off for a final time when it completely just stayed on for at least a minute.

"Well that was all a load of nothing." Ben said, not taking his eye off the light.

Stan was about to start singing again when the light began to grow brighter and brighter.

"I spoke to soon."

"Blake I swear to fuck if your messing back there—"

"I'm not doing anything I swear!" He raised his voice in defence, cutting Stan's mild annoyance off.

It proceeded to grow and grow until Richie had to physically look away before it blinded him.

A sharp crack made them all jump and tumble off stage, Eddie hauling Richie off as Richie could not see for the life of him.

"Jesus fuck! What the hell is happening?" Richie yelled, blinking rapidly to get his eyesight back.

"I don't fucking know!" Blake scrapped at the controls desperately, his voice cracking.

"Everybody stay back!" Mike shouted from behind them, dragging the closest person back which happened to be Stan.

They all ran back as the light started to spark and crackle for a

moment, before going out all together with a harsh BANG! and glass shattered down onto the stage.

A few screamed and a few just stared wide-eyed at it, everybody's mouths hanging open.

"Ok..., what in the seven shades of hell was that?" Eric blinked, his Irish accent stronger than ever.

"It's the heat I'm telling you! What did I say? Even the lights couldn't handle it!" Richie exclaimed.

"Richie lights don't falter in heat." Ben pointed out.

"We don't know how old these lights are!"

"He's not wrong." Buffy agreed, shrugging.

Chloe, ignoring everybody's comment, paced around the floor. "No no no no oh shit fuck shit no nononon—"

"Chloe chill, it's just a light." Bev placed a hand on her shoulder to calm her down.

"Just a light? It wasn't 'just a light' Bev! It was the main light which we can't perform without since it's the one that actually allows the audience to see the actors on stage! The light that probably costed millions to make and now its shattered all over the stage which means we can't even continue to perform on it now!" Chloe ranted. Richie had never seen Chloe break down so much, over a light. But then again, like Richie had said earlier, patience for some did leave as soon as it came.

"Well I'm sure it can be fixed right? I mean how hard can it be?" Blake fiddled with his thumb nervously.

Chloe stared at him. "The whole thing fused and the glass shattered into a million pieces."

"Why d-d-d-duh-d-don't we j-j-Just buy a-a-an-a-another one?" Bill suggested.

“Oh I don’t know because they cost about a zillion pounds?” Greta spat.

“Guys guys chill out, that was only one light that broke, we have about ten others. If worse comes to worse we’ll have to use them but in the mean time we can be saving up money or something.” Mike said reassuringly. Everybody nodded. That’s just how Mike worked. It’s like he had some sort of spell to cast over them all in which made people become calmer. Like he was some kind of guru.

Richie swallowed a laugh but smirked to himself.

“Right well I think that’s rehearsals done for today, let’s go get a drink or something before we die of heat.” Bev felt her head and fanned it again.

“Finally somebody agrees with me.” Richie sighed dramatically. “How about you Eddie spaghetti? Do you agree with me?” He slung a lazy arm around Eddie’s shoulder as they began to walk out the hall.

“Don’t call me that, but actually yes, I do.” Eddie gently shoved Richie’s arm off him.

“Woah woah woah! Eds-o here actually agrees with me!” Richie shouted in an English accent before being shoved playfully backwards into the hall.

As he was walking out the door his eyes caught on something. He turned to look and saw a small pair of scissors from the art and crafts classrooms. Beside it there was a small bit of wired something Richie couldn’t quite make out beside them.

He frowned at them for a moment or so and then shrugged. He picked up the scissors and continued out of the hall.

“Hey Stanley! I’ve got a surprise for you!”

Eddie Kaspbrak, heading to cycling class at the end of Lunch

Eddie tried his earnest to focus all of his attention on his feet as he walked towards the fields at which his first cycling class would be

held.

Left foot out, right foot out, left foot, right foot, left-

Would their coach expect them to be able to ride around the whole of Whitemore? Because if so, Eddie might need his aspirator, and his coach might not allow that. But if he didn't allow it, then Eddie could realistically stop breathing and die.

It's a placebo anyway but it keeps him from dying. Or it did. Or does.

But his point is that this whole cycling club idea could very well lead to possible death. Or injury. But most likely death. And if he died-

"Eddie?" Ben said, voice whisper soft.

"Hmm." Eddie said, looking up from the pine green grass and at Ben's concerned looking face.

"I asked if you had to wear a helmet." Ben said.

"Oh." Eddie said, his worries sinking back into his brain, back so they were still there, still ready to creep forward at any given moment and send his tummy cramping with nerves. "I'm not sure. I mean, we didn't in p.e."

"Right." Ben said. "Well, we're here now."

Eddie realised that they were indeed here. In his hurricane of thinking, he hadn't even noticed the grass slopping up until it reached the small hill at which the cycling club was. A line of thundercloud grey bikes stand there, looking like angry animals and there are already people standing around around, their voices crashing into one.

"Shit, I'm late." Eddie said, his breathing picking up already.

"So?" Ben said. "You're Eddie fu-" Ben coughed and blushed slightly, "Eddie fucking Kaspbrak."

"Did you just swear, Ben?" Eddie said, laughing properly for the first time in a good half hour.

“Don’t make me do it again.” Ben said, smiling with his pink blushed cheeks.

Eddie shook his head and rubbed the end of his pink tinted nose as he made his way to the other kids there.

“Kaspbrak!” Someone said, and Mr Vally strided over.

“Sir.” Eddie said, wondering why teachers always used surnames like it was the Victorian times and not just be a normal human and use first names.

“Glad to see you here.” Mr Vally said. “You have a real talent for cycling.”

“Thanks.” Eddie said, feeling stupid as he stood there.

“Hanscom, are you trying out too?”

“Oh, no.” Ben said, smiling. “I’m just here for moral support.”

“Well, there’s nothing like support in sports!” Mr Valley said, and Eddie felt some of his life fall away just like that.

“Yeah!” Ben said enthusiastically.

“If you two are the last ones,” Mr Valley said, checking around, “then I guess we’ll start.”

He blew his whistle, making Eddie flinch at the high, sharp sound, and everyone crowded around Mr Valley.

Eddie stepped back to join the wavering circle and felt his heart start to hammer again, each beat pressing in the fact that he was different from everyone else here, that he shouldn’t be here, that it was a waste of time.

Ben nudged him gently, warmth spreading around Eddie like millions of fireflies, and he felt reassurance in its simplest form.

Ben was a loser, too. Eddie didn’t mean that to sound harsh or spiteful. As time came on, he was beginning to realise that being a

loser was one of the best things he could be. To be a loser was something Eddie loved most about himself, and the rest of his friends. And although Ben wouldn't be riding next to him, he was still there.

"We already know why we're here." Mr Valley said to the crowd of people, people squinting their eyes to see him through the sun that was behind him. "It's my honour to be apart of this club yet again, and I'm sure none of you will disappoint. It's also my honour to say that five of you will be picked and chosen to race in our start of winter sports day. Obviously people won't be immediately picked today but I am expecting to see stand outs!"

Eddie felt a rush of sudden determination like a tidal wave coursing through him. Riding in the Winter sports day, doing something he was actually good at, that prospect seemed amazing. He'd be able to do it for his tower, like how Stan swam for North and how Mike played lacrosse for both North and East. That, above all, marked a place in his mind, like a dam, blocking all his previous worries of injuries (for the time being, anyway). He was Eddie fucking Kaspbrak and he wasn't about to let that go.

They went through a few more safety notices which Eddie had no doubt that they all knew and then it was time to actually get started.

"If everyone can pick a bike." Mr Valley said, and Eddie broke away from the circle to pick a bicycle. The steel handle bars were cold under his palms and that, more than anything, brought him out of his carrying thoughts.

"Hansom, you can help me time everyone." Mr Valley said, and Ben walked over, taking the stopwatch with a sort of gentleness that maybe only Ben Hansom possessed.

"Hope you don't fall off." The person next to Eddie, who sounded a lot like James from West, said.

Eddie didn't look to find out. Instead he simply replied; "Hope your ego doesn't get stuck in the gear break."

"Is everyone ready?" Mr Valley said. Eddie slid onto his bike and stood on tip-toes to say balance. "Around to the lacrosse field and

back, okay?”

“Okay!” Everyone called back, their cry like it’s own wind.

“3...2...1...go!”

Eddie pushed down on his left peddle and went rocketing down the small mount they were on. He found both his footing and started to peddle again, letting the wind sing besides his ears, letting it brush his hair as he headed to the lacrosse field.

Everything fell behind him now. His thoughts, his worries, his Mothers voice that was slowly becoming more and more quieter. They were all behind him as he peddled on, feeling the rush that lived somewhere in his heart.

He didn’t even need to think about peddling or directions. He just let his feet do what they had to do and enjoyed that infinite feeling, watching the greens blur together, tasting the salty air and hearing the distant cry of gulls.

Before he knew it, he was back to the start, Mr Valley and Ben cheering him.

He let his bike clatter to the ground and ran over, cheeks flushed.

“That was great!” Mr Valley said as more people started to arrive back. “You were definitely a stand out today.”

Eddie couldn’t help but smile. He wanted to do it all again, to feel the heat in his chest, but somehow it was time to get back already.

But as he was walking back, Ben talking to Eddie and Eddie talking back, part of him wondered if his Mothers voice would haunt him forever.

Stan Uris, in the Sewing Room at the end of Lunch

“Are you sure you know what you’re doing?” Stan asked as Bev fiddled around with the sewing machine.

“Yes.” Bev said, not looking away.

“Like, 100% sure?”

“Stan,” She said, turning around now. “I’m sure I’m sure.”

Stan saw the certainty in her blue-grey eyes and smiled.

“Right, sorry.” He said. “It’s just I normally work with Richie so-“

Bev smiled this time and waved Stan off in a very mature way for any of the Losers and went back to the machine.

It was after all their lessons had finished for the day, and as usual, people were running errands for the play. Him and Bev were on costume design, as Bev was pretty good at designing and Stan was good with sketching and measuring. They had taken over the sewing room, and now their fabrics were strewn all over the room like leaves on the road, deep pinks and blues saturating the room.

Stan watched Bev handle the sewing machine for a few more seconds to make sure she really was okay and then went back down to his designs. Charcol lines of jackets and dresses and too-tight trousers were imprinted on the lined paper, done with a swift yet accurate style. The measurements were jotted down next to them.

“Oookay,” Bev said, sitting up straight, “we’re ready.”

Stan shifted and passed Bev the sketches. She took them, her chipped black nail polish holding onto the paper as if it was a very old book.

“These are great.” She beamed, light radiating from her.

“Obviously.” Stan joked. Art and sewing weren’t exactly his strongest subject, but this somehow felt different. And Richie hadn’t been trying to sew his hands together either, so that was an obvious improvement.

“I say we do the pink ladies jackets first.” Bev said, running her finger over the grey lines of the drawing.

“You’re the boss.” Stan said. He slid off the wooden stall and went

over to collect the hot pink stack of fabric and brought them over to Bev.

“Measure Jan’s on me.” Bev said, getting up. “Me and Sandie are basically the same hight.”

“Bet Bill would love this.” Stan said, smirking.

Bev let out a little laugh, but it sounded mechanical. It rung in Stan’s ears as he got the tape measure and he immediately knew something was up.

“What is it?” He asked, beginging to measure Bev’s arm length.

“Its just...” Bev sighed. “Bill.”

“Oh, yeah.” Stan agreed, nodding his head.

Bev whacked him, laughing slightly. “Funny, Stan. It’s more like... our relationship. It’s changed.”

“Oh?” Stan said, not sure if he should really give advice on Bev’s love life with his experience with a grand total of zero girls.

“Yeah.” Bev said. “He just... feels so distant, ever since we got back.”

“Maybe it was just being away for six weeks.” Stan suggested, moving to measure around Bev’s waist.

Bev pursed her lips thoughtfully. “I’m not sure. I mean, I know he’s complicated-“

“No he isn’t”

“but it all seems so sudden. Like, the thing we had last year is just... gone.”

Stan furrowed his eyebrows and wrote down the measurements. “Well, people break up all the time. It’s not like every relationship lasts.”

“No.” Bev sighed. “But there was never anything wrong with us. We

were never mean or bitter to each other or anything so why now?"

Stan finished measuring Bev and wound up the tape measure in a tight circle, trying to see Bev's words how he saw the measurements.

"What if you were never in love?" He said finally. The tape was in a full circle now, and he placed it carefully on the table as Bev asked; "What?"

"Well, maybe you and Bill never liked each other in that way." Stan said slowly. "Maybe you were just friends and the swap from home to Whitemore made you think it was something more than that."

Bev didn't say anything for a while and Stan was scared he'd somehow pissed her off. But when he looked up, Bev was just smiling softly, her eyes full of understanding for the things Stan was trying to say but didn't have the words to.

"Maybe." She said quietly. "Maybe you're right. But I'm fucked if I know what to do."

They didn't talk for a while, Stan finishing up the measurements and Bev sorting through the piles of fabric. The wind blew against the window, giving their classroom a warm impression, and Stan was suddenly immensely grateful of Whitemore. Of the people, of the classes, of the feelings it held home to. And maybe he was right and maybe he was wrong; maybe Bev and Bill had felt something for each other. Maybe they had just forgotten those feelings. Or the feelings had left them. But Stan had a strong feeling it would work out okay.

"Right!" Bev said loudly, his voice seemingly masked. "Let's get on with these jackets."

Stan went over and cut the pink with big clumsy scissors. It made a fine cutting sound and once he'd finished measuring them, Bev took them and began to pin them up.

Yes, Stan thought. Everything would work out okay. They already had a play to deal with, didn't they? What more could happen this year?

A hell lot more, as him and the Losers were about to find out.

Mike Hanlon, in the Dormitory at night

The brisk night air was cold, but their dorm room was colder. Not that Mike could ever say that their dorm room in the winter was warm, since the radiators always seemed to malfunction. Or just never turn on in general. But this time Mike physically had to throw on his jumper over his pyjama shirt, which he'd never done in his entire life.

"Temperature sure was fucked up today, huh." Richie stated, almost shivering still even being wrapped up in his duvet like sushi.

"I know it's generally cold in here but it feels like the Antarctic sneezed or something and blew its cold air here." Ben said, putting on his third pair of socks.

"I think I've solved the problem." Stan said, walking up to the window and slamming it shut, everybody groaning in response. The window often made this screeching noise that sounded worst than the train stopping at Whitemore - Mike would even stretch to say it sounded worst than the pigs on feeding day - which is exactly why they never opened it.

"Who left the window open?" Mike hugged his arms around his waist in attempt to feel some warmth from his body.

"P-p-p-probably Blake." Bill snorted.

"Hey I head that!" Blake shouted through the closed bathroom door. "And no it wasn't me, I can't stand the cold."

"Don't we know it." Stan muttered, making everybody chuckle. Just as Stan was about to walk back to his bed he quickly turned back to the window. Something caught his eye.

"Stan? You good?" Mike's eyebrows knitted together.

"Shit." He said.

Richie got up to see what he was looking at. "What's the matter old

chap?”

“The material Bev and I bought earlier,” Stan said. Mike got up. “It’s stuck i the window. We can’t lift the window up or it’ll—“

But Richie wasn’t listening. “That’s alright we’ll just open the window and—“ Richie hauled the window open again and just as, Mike assumed, Stan was just about to warn, the cloth flew straight out of the window and along the path.

“...fly straight out.” Stan finished and held the back of his head in his hands.

Richie turned slowly from the window to Stan. “So um, how important was that bit of material again?”

“Oh you know, nothing much, just Danny Zuko’s jacket! Richie how could you be so stupid?!” Stan snapped.

“Jesus if you’d warned me—“

“I tried to warn you but you just stopped listening as you always do and did what you wanted!” Stan panted, and stormed back to his bed.

The dorm was left in an uncomfortable silence when Eddie spoke up softly to Stan. “Hey, it’s ok. We can just buy some more.”

“Buy some more? Hell no I’m not going back to that place, the guy who worked their literally tried to seduce Bev and take her away! To hell with that place!” Stan was almost shouting now.

“What?” Bill and Ben both said simultaneously.

“You know, if no one had opened the window, who di—“ Blake re entered the room, noticed how quiet everyone was and shut his mouth.

“How about we just get it back then?” Richie said quietly, preparing himself for Stan’s wrath again.

“How, Richie? How do you suppose we get that?” Stan turned to him.

Richie stayed quiet but Mike didn't think it was so bad of an idea. "You know, that's not bad."

"What isn't?"

"His idea," Mike said. "I mean how far away can it be?"

"There is a mountain range to our left and an entire ocean to our right." Eric pointed out. Mike gave him a look which said, 'for the love of God please shut up'.

"Chances are its stuck on a tree somewhere near by, so let's just get it." Mike shrugged.

"What if a teacher comes in to check on us after lights out?" Eddie asked.

"Come on Eds, where's your sense of adventure?" Richie joked.

"Just saying." Eddie shrugged.

"We can stay until after they've checked up on us and then we can leave." Mike nodded.

"Let me guess, me and Blake stay here?" Eric said, but it wasn't harsh, smiling playfully.

"If you want, y'all can keep watch for us." Mike chuckled, feeling a bit bad but not dwelling on it for too long.

"Really think this is gonna work?" Stan said begrudgingly.

"We can try. And besides it's not the end of the world if we don't get it back, we can just go back to the store another day." Mike said.

So it was settled. Eddie was right in thinking someone would check on them, because not long after they finished the plan they heard footsteps creaking up the stairs. Bill whacked off the lights and they all flew into their freezing cold beds, pretending to be fast asleep. Soon after the door was closed again they waited for the footsteps to subside and started to pull on some more clothing.

“Anyone got a snow suit handy? Could be useful in this weather.” Richie said, throwing on one of the hoodies Eddie didn’t have, Eddie currently pulling one of those on.

They crept out of the dorm room, surprised to be feeling such sudden warmth, and began to head down stairs.

“Wait.” Eddie whispered. “Should we just get Bev?”

Their hive mind took a split second to decide and they all went walking quietly back to East’s dorm. Ben and Mike silently opened the door and woke up Bev.

“Wh-“ She began too loudly and Ben and Mike both shushed her rapidly. She frowned but seemed to understand that she probably would not be returning to her dorm for a while, throwing on a jumper and pulling thick woolly socks over her feet.

Once they were all together they sped down the steps as quickly as they could, dodging the creaky step every so often.

Bill opened the back door of which Mike guessed was only kept open for the gardener and they all sped off down the path.

“Which way did it go?” Ben puffed.

“Did what go?” Bev asked, still confused over the whole situation.

“Well you see—“ Mike started.

“This way! It went down the coastal path!” Stan whisper-shouted.

“Our dorm room was extremely cold and we figured out it was because the widow was left open. Now, when Stan shut it he realised —“

“Guys! I see black! Down this way!”

“that he shut some of the material for Danny Zuko’s jacket in the window. So, Richie being Richie thought he’d jus—“

“I hate to b-buh-b-b-break it t-t-to everyone but th-the wind is p-p-p-

picking up!”

“Well then let’s run faster!!”

“open the window to get it back, which was smart enough but unfortunately the wind had been picking up, as shown currently, and it slipped out the window and—“

“Guys I see it! On that rock by the sea!”

“Jesus Christ Rich there are many rocks by the sea! Which one?”

“That one!”

“that brings us to our current situation.” Mike finished, and not surprisingly, Bev didn’t looked shocked at all.

She just shrugged and said, “Yeah, that sounds like something Richie would do.”

Richie guided them to the rock which apparently had the material on and, Richie being correct, there it sat, in all its glory. The pre-Danny-Zuko-jacket.

“How do you suppose we get it?” Stan asked gingerly.

They all looked at it for a minute before Richie walked forward.

“Wh-w-What are you d-doing?” Bill asked, staring at him as if even by Richie’s standards Richie was being stupid.

“Climbing the rocks.” Richie replied simply.

“Rich you’re gonna get yourself killed!” Eddie shook his head madly.

“Look, it’s not that high and the winds died down a bit.” Richie pointed to the material. “It’s on the next rock up, so it’s not like I’m climbing Everest without a harness, ok?”

The losers shared a look, not saying a word. Richie took that as a green flag and began to climb. Bev clung on to Mike’s arm, digging her slightly chipped finger nails into his arm. Mike wouldn’t

complain, he enjoyed the warmth even if it did cost ten nail marks in his skin, through the layers of clothing.

Sure enough, Richie grabbed the the black material and jumped down, past all the foot and hand holds he'd used to get up there.

"See? Easy as pie." Richie tossed it at Stan with ease.

"I think the expression you're looking for is piece of cake." Stan corrected, but he couldn't hide the thankful grin that rose on his face.

"Well," Ben sighed after a moment of two. "I guess we should head back before Matron has a bird."

"She already checked on us anyway, we can stay for a bit, right?" Eddie said, almost longingly as he stared over the starry horizon.

"How l-l-l-likely is i-i-it to get n-n-n-n-n-pneumo- pneumonia?" Bill asked.

"Likely."

"He didn't say definite! Last one in the sea has to do Blake's laundry!" Richie yelled and ripped off his shoes and socks and rolled up his pyjama bottoms.

"Oh hell no I'm not going in there." Eddie crosses his arms over his chest and shivered.

"Oh Eds, do not fret, i'll not let you have the honour of doing Blake's laundry." And with that, Richie picked Eddie up in bridal style and walked towards the sea, despite Eddie's well, you could say attempts but it was more like attacks, to let him go.

Beverly was somehow up on Bill's shoulders at the edge of the shore, Bill dipping his toes in before hopping away in shock. Ben was trying to help Eddie out of Richie's grip but from where Mike was sitting it seemed like iron.

Mike walked over to Stan and sat down by him, patting the sand for him to sit down to. "Hey."

“Hey.” Stan smiled, wrapping himself in the material to keep warm.

“Not going in huh?” Mike chuckled, watching as the five jumped around manically, ankle deep in the icy cold ocean.

“The day I go in the sea in the winter is the day I stop caring.” Stan said.

“I’ll remind you of that.” Mike raised an eyebrow at him.

“Try me.” He laughed, looking down and letting his hand trail through the sand.

They sat in quiet for a while, contently looking at the rest getting hypothermia. Mike was almost tempted to join them, but he didn’t really feel like leaving Stan alone in the cold. And Mike, too, wasn’t totally invested in getting pneumonia.

“Hey hey, you see that?” Stan suddenly whispered, pointing up in the air. It took Mike a couple of seconds before he saw what he was being shown. There was a silhouette of Mike could only assume was an owl, swiftly flying across and into the woods.

“An owl?” Mike guessed.

“A barred owl. Not usually seen around this neck of the woods actually, but beautiful even so.” Stan said almost dreamily. Mike smiled at him. “Know what it means if you see an owl?”

“That you’re up past bed time?” Mike chuckled.

Stan shook his head. “It often symbolises death.”

Mike blinked. “Oh.”

“But it also means change. A change happening in your life.” Stan said.

“I don’t know if I like that one any better.” Mike replied honestly.

“You should, change can be good. Sometimes spotting an owl doesn’t mean anything but it doesn’t mean it’s not a blessing.” Stan yawned

tiredly and rested his head on Mike's shoulder.

Maybe Stan was right, change isn't always good but it's inevitable. You have to take it in your stride and then really, change is never really bad. Life stops for no one so you have to keep moving with it. Though there was one thing Mike didn't want to change.

And that was the Losers club.

"Come on b-b-b-bird watches," Bev was shivering up the beach with the rest of them behind her. "I'll let you wake Stan up." She smiled at Mike. "We better h-head back."

Notes for the Chapter:

i love all seven of my children < 3

11. Act Three, Scene Four; Now jump to the sound of the screams

Notes for the Chapter:

Halloween Special a month early because that's what we do

Stan Uris, waking up in his Dormitory

If Stan were to say he'd had a calm morning, well, he'd be lying.

The first thing he was greeted with once he was somewhat conscious was Bill jumping up and down wildly on Stan's bed, shaking his shoulders manically. Once he saw Stan was awake he bounced off his bed and stared at Stan excitedly as if a kid waking up their parents to open presents on Christmas morning.

Stan blinked rapidly and glanced up at Bill blearily. "If you don't give me one good reason for waking me up at ass crack of dawn then I will personally re open that window and shove you out of it."

"C-c-come on, you can't b-b-b-be cranky on h-h-huh-h-Halloween!" Bill pulled off Stan's duvet.

"Sorry?" Stan knitted his eyebrows together, sitting up right.

"It's h-Halloween—"

"It's wHAT NOW?"

"Come help m-m-me wake the others u-u-up." Bill moved onto Mike's bed.

It took Stan a moment or two to finally comprehend the idea. It actually made sense. How he forgot is something he will never know, but the fact that Bill actually remembered, was completely beyond him.

"How did you remember?" Stan rubbed his eyes.

“How d-d-d-duh-did you for-f-forget?” Bill reasoned. Stan blinked and shrugged.

“Fair enough.”

After about five minutes of Bill and Stan giving up on singularly waking everyone up and just screaming at the top of their lungs, the whole of north and possibly the whole of Whitmore was awake and vaguely recognising the term which Bill had used as ‘scaring people without getting put in jail day’.

“You know what would be really scary?” Richie smirked, still sprawled in his bed. “Eddie being straight.”

“You know what would be scarier? You shutting your mouth for once.” Eddie snapped, rolling his eyes.

“Someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed.”

“Shut up Rich.”

“Anyway!” Mike cut them off before their bickering could take a turn for the worse. Or end with them making out. Stan gave up caring at this point. “We need to discuss the real situation here.”

“And that would be..?” Stan rubbed his forehead, wondering what possibly else he could’ve forgotten.

“Man you really have forgotten Halloween.” Ben laughed, shaking his head.

“Hey it’s not just me! Eddie couldn’t even remember the definition of Halloween!” Stan pointed out.

“In my defence I was just recovering from that loud screeching sound. What was that by the way?” Eddie frowned.

“That w-w-wuh-w-would be our s-sp-s-spec-s-spectacular singing.” Bill said proudly.

“How did you get casted as Danny Zuko again?”

“I t-t-turned on my ch-ch-chuh-ch-charm.”

“Or drugged us all—“

“Guys! The real situation would be costumes.” Mike said. There was a simultaneous “ohhhhh” shared around the room.

“Well shit what do we do then?” Richie said.

“I’m sure there are spare costumes somewhere.” Ben reached under his bed and grabbed his slippers.

“I suppose it’s a matter of who gets there first.” Blake said and everybody grinned at each other.

Before they knew it they were running down to East’s dorm room and rousing them all awake, despite their complaints. Soon they were all sprinting down the stairs, not exactly sure where they were going.

“Wait so where do you think these costumes will be?” Chloe asked, hopping as she pulled on her second sock while trying to keep up with the others.

“My only guess would be in the drama hall.” Ben said.

“Oh you mean that big old treasure chest filled with weird stuff?” Sandie panted.

“Yup.”

“Well then, I guess that’s we’ll all be settling with yoga outfits from the 70s.” Bev laughed.

“That or a tree.” Party snorted.

North and East tower practically flew to the hall, rolling up on stage and striding to the left wing, where the extra costumes were always kept.

“Whitemore’s going full out on decoration this year huh.” Buffy stared out off stage at the cobwebs that were draped along the lights and white balloons with ghosts painted on them hung around the

walls.

“Which is why I’m extremely questioning how I forgot the day.” Stan huffed a laugh.

“Guys we should do a fashion show!” Emily squealed, holding up what looked like Dorothy’s dress from the Wizard of Oz.

“Yesss! Ok who ever wants to go first stays in the wings and the rest of us will wait off stage.” Bev said.

“L-L-L-Ladies first.” Bill said, and Stan caught Bev’s eye.

“Which one.” Greta raised her eyebrows.

“Me bitch.” Eddie said and strolled off into a dressing room. Greta blinked.

“Alrighty then,” Richie clapped his hands and everybody walked/jumped off stage. “Sir Kaspbrak, whenever you are ready!”

A few moments later Eddie walked confidently to centre stage with slim fit black jeans and a tucked in red top with flared sleeves, topping it off with Red Devil horns and a black cape. Stan didn’t know if he’d imagine it or was just plain old high but he was pretty sure he saw Richie recoil ever so slightly next to him.

Next up was Bev, who came out with a red turtle neck and denim skirt, a charcoal black head band which pushed back her light blonde wig and knee high black socks.

“Ooh! You’re Sabrina the witch girl right?” Alison exclaimed and Bev nodded, hopping off the stage gracefully.

After was Audra, cat walking down the stage in, well, a cat costume. She had skin tight leather jeans on which she would be using for Grease and a low-ish-not-too-low-for-it-to-be-inappropriate-for-school-cut top with black cat ears, her hair pulled up into a clean high pony tail.

“Damn, Mrs Wilson will be after you that’s for sure.” Buffy chuckled.

“Yeah along with half the boys.” Bev grinned and wiggled her eyebrows.

Next was Mike, who came onto stage with a black and red cape, covering his face with it.

“Wow that’s creative.” Blake folded his arms, getting a whack on the arm by Bill. Suddenly he dropped the cape and smiled, revealing two sets of fangs in his mouth and black eyeshadow dabbed over his eyelids.

“You were saying, Blake?” Stan turned to him and raised his eyebrows. Blake rolled his eyes and Stan turned around, satisfied.

“Please tell me you washed the fangs before wearing them.” Eddie said. Yes, he wasn’t as bad as he was with the whole sickness thing, in fact he rarely came out with comments at all, but he often let the odd one slip and Stan would suddenly be taken back to the first time he came to Whitmore. The first time he’d ever met friends that actually liked him for who he was. Those seven friends being the best he’s ever had.

Then after Mike was Patty and Alison, who’d seemed to team up on the outfits and came on stage in matching blue dresses and matching hairstyles.

“Let me guess, the Shining?” Richie asked.

“You know it.” Patty grinned and they made their way down the steps.

Next was Bill, who just came walking casually on stage with a mattress sheet thrown over his head with two cut out holes for his eyesight.

“I don’t know about you guys but I do not have a clue what Bill may be.” Sandie said, making them all chuckle.

“You’re gonna get boiled under there.” Audra laughed.

“Well, I’ve c-c-c-committed to th-th-the outfit now.” The sheet shrugged and floated off stage.

Next was Stan's turn, who'd found a long silver beard and cloak in the chest. He stared in the mirror as he just about fit the hat on over his hair and straightened out his outfit. He nodded at himself and made his way on stage.

"Bet you'll never guess who I am." Stan stroked his beard smugly.

"Some guy from DND?" Richie asked, and Stan shook his head.

"Wait, are you Gandalf from the Lord of the Rings?" Eddie said, beginning to grin. Stan nodded and Eddie broke out into a full fledged smile.

"How'd you know?" Stan rolled off stage and sat down, his beard beginning to get rather itchy.

"I don't know, that's just how I imagined Gandalf when I read it." Eddie shrugged, readjusting the devil horns on his head.

After Stan was Greta, walking on to the stage in a skin tight skeleton body suit, which luckily wasn't see-through, with her hair in a half pony tail with a white scrunchie.

"Looks like it won't be just Audra who will have all the boys after her." Patty laughed and nudged Blake who was still in a strop for zero reason.

Speaking of, Blake was next, who came on with a black shirt and trousers with his blazer on and a massive afro white wig.

"Einstein?"

"Heck yeah."

Then Buffy, wearing a black skirt, black tights, and a black top. Oh and a black mask.

"I'm bat girl." She explained, and raised her arms to which, would you be surprised, were black wings sprouting outwards.

"How the hell did you find that in there?" Bev asked, pointing at the chest.

“It’s actually bigger than it looks.” Buffy shrugged.

Then Ben came on with a ripped white shirt with white angel wings and, the opposite to Buffy, white jeans. Even a gold halo head band.

“I was gonna go for a zombie angel but i couldn’t find any sort of green face paint so I had to just stick with angel.” He said, adjusting his wings.

“Don’t worry we can do all that at break or something.” Eddie said and Ben nodded.

“I still don’t know how Mike found black eye shadow.” Bev tilted her head in mild confusion.

“I just found it by the corner of the mirrors.” Mike shrugged.

To cut a long story short, Sandie was the Greek god Athena, and Eric was a leprechaun.

“I think everyone saw that coming to be honest.” Richie said as Eric began to walk off stage and everyone was laughing once again.

“How long until the breakfast bell?” Ben asked.

Mike checked his watch. “About ten minutes.”

“Great! Enough time for me.” Richie leaped up to back stage.

Finally it was Richie’s turn, who paraded up stage with a pirates outfit on and a great large hat, which even had a white feather stuck to it. “Oi ye swashbucklers, polish me boot!” He yelled in a British accent.

“In your dreams!” Stan pulled down his beard and called back.

Once they’d all finished chattering and laughing at each other’s outfits, the bell rang and they all made their way happily down to the canteen.

Stan thought that was just about the wildest it could get that day.

Boy did they all have a storm coming for them.

Beverly Marsh, in her period two French Class

It was six minutes into their period two class and so far, their French Teacher was a no show. This didn't really bother Bev, who herself was failing at languages. It also didn't bother half the class, apparently.

People were sitting on their tables (including herself) yelling at one another. Alison and Eric were drawing on the board and paper airplanes were being thrown across the classroom like bees over a flower field. Except, Bev thought, it would have to be one fucking weird flower field.

Every single inch of their French classroom was draped with cobwebs, many with plastic spiders in. The blackboard had fake blood running down it, and the windows all had a weird, orange sheet over it, so all sunlight which fell into the classroom was an hazy orange colour.

Another paper airplane zipped past Bev and she laughed, touching her white-blonde Sabrina wig. Whitmore really went all out for Halloween, that was clear. And it was such a polar difference from her last school, where you couldn't find a glue stick if you searched the whole building (Whitmore seemed to have an everlasting supply).

"Is this teacher ever going to show up?" Eddie yelled over to Bev, his devil horns trembling slightly.

"Hope not." Bev said, and grinned a grin that matched her Sabrina outfit perfectly. "French is so much more fun without the teacher."

Eddie laughed a laugh that was the total opposite to his outfit, a laugh of happiness and gold and butter, and moved over to perch on Bev's desk.

"What is it, national sit on top of a desk day?" Stan asked from Bev and Eddie's right. He was actually sitting down on his chair, his silver

beard resting gently on his thighs. Ben and Richie were sitting on top of the desk though, flipping over a rubber which they had written 'yes' and 'no' on and asking questions.

"That's smart." Bev said, watching it flip through the air like a falling leave. "What happens when it lands on its side, professor?"

"It means maybe." Ben said, as the eraser landed with a dull thud on the table.

"I though it meant throw again." Richie interrupted, tipping back his large pirate hat so it wouldn't fall off his head.

Unfortunately, Ben and Richie were interrupted from answering when Mike and Bill ran over and almost fell into the table. They had taken to running around the classroom in circles for no good reason Bev could see and now Bill flunked the table, kicking both Richie and Ben to make space for himself and his ghost sheet which was tied around his shoulders.

Mike seemed to calculate that there would be no room for him and instead sat down on Stan's lap.

"I s-s-say if t-the t-t-teacher doesn't s-s-s-show up in the n-n-next ten m-m-minutes we go p-p-pumpkin picking." Bill said.

"Yes, I love picking all the pumpkins around Whitemore." Stan said.

"We could do something." Bev said. She wanted a cigarette, the warm roll of paper between her numb fingers. Especially on a day as chilly as it was currently.

"What do you think happened to Mam'zelle?" Eddie asked.

"Maybe Frankistine got her." Ben said.

"Give me your brainnnnnssss." Stan said in his best zombie voice.

"Light meal." Bev said, grinning.

Quite suddenly, the door made a echo clicking sound, and the handle pushed and opened. Ben seemed to roll off the table while Richie and

Bill jumped off. Eddie clambered down and dived into his seat with a little more grace and Stan had to all but push Mike off his lap.

The rest of East and North quieted quickly, voices dying down like wind after a sudden storm. It was now unnaturally quiet, the tension practically cuttable.

The door opened fully but instead of Mam'zelle coming in, Matron did instead.

"Morning class." She said to the tight-lipped second years. "Mam'zelle is away all of today on a French exhibition so I will be taking you class."

The class cheered and Bev clapped loudly, three times. Over the year and a bit at Whitmore, although Bev would never say so out loud (she didn't even really realise it), Matron had become a little like a Mother to Bev. Having never had a Mum who was partially good, Matron filled that gap with her gentle caring and warm character. And she was a good laugh, as well. Sometimes, Bev forgot she was meant to be a adult and not a student. Like now, for instance. She was dressed as a killer nurse, covered in very bright red and with her hair done crazily, purple and green spiders sticking out of it.

And least French wouldn't be as bad as she thought it was going to be, either.

"Okay, okay, settle down now!" Matron said. The class obeyed and Matron walked over to the desk, looking at the stack of French books.

Bev punched Stan's arm lightly, still beaming. "Thank fuck we won't need to do anything difficult." She hissed to her right.

"French is always difficult." A voice from next to Stan's legs said, and Bev realised that Mike was still on the floor from where Stan had shaken him off. "I can never pronounce any of it."

"You don't exactly try." Stan pointed out.

"I'll have you know I try very hard, thank you." Mike retorted.

"Micheal, can you please get off the floor and return to you seat,

thank you.” Matron said from the desk. Mike looked up startled, and then moped to his desk further back.

“You can change seats later if you really must.” Matron said, picking up chalk from the thin wooden board stand. She rubbed out what Alison and Eric had scribbled earlier (North and East Lacross team stays winning!) and wrote down the date. Then, stopped herself midway.

“I was never great at French.” She said, turning around. “The wording was too crippling. Maybe we can have a slightly different lesson to what Mam’zelle originally planned. You are ahead, anyway.”

“I agree wholeheartedly.” Richie spoke up from the back.

“Do any of you speak any other languages?” Matron asked.

“My Mum’s Japanese.” Emily said. “And she’s been trying to teach me some.”

“I’m a quarter Polish, on my Dad’s side.” Eddie said from Bev’s right. “But I don’t actually know much Polish, other than cześć. really”

“Mmm.” Matron said. “Im fluent in Latin.”

“Are you Latin?” Emily asked.

Matron blinked.

“I tried to learn Spanish in my last school.” Buffy said. “Wasn’t much good at it.”

Bev leaned into her palms, listening with a content smile. It was moments like these when she truly felt like she was meant to be at Whitmore. Like these people were her family.

“We should let Matron teach us Latin!” Eric said.

“Uh, no thanks.” Greta said. “It’s a dead langue, what’s the point?”

“Thank you for that, Ms Bowie.” Matron said, standing up straight.

"But there's really not much point in me teaching you whole new langue. Class ends half an hour early anyway."

"It does?" Ben asked. "Why?"

"For your Towers slot." Matron said calmly.

"Slot?" Audra said. "Slot for what?"

"You don't know?" Matron asked.

"No." Audra said.

"Ah."

The class waited for a elaboration which didn't come. Beverly drummed her red painted nails on the desk and looked around the class expectedly.

"Well?" She asked. "What's our slot? Is it bad?"

"Did we do something?" Blake said.

"Um-" Matron began.

"Wait is this about the play?" Patty questioned.

"God, can we go two seconds without talking about the goddam play!" Greta snapped.

"Sor-ry!" Patty mumbled, shifting in her chair.

"Okay!" Matron called. "That will be quite enough, thank you."

She made her way slowly over to the desk, East and North silent.

"I suppose you were meant to find the first clue yourself but oh well." She said. "Every two to three years, Whitemore turns half the school into a haunted house, and each year gets an hour to go around to find the prize. You're second year so your slot was half way through second period, see? It's like a treasure hunt, in a way, following a trail to find different clues. But I slipped up and told you before you found the first clue which leads you to the start of the trail."

“Don’t feel bad.” Mike said.

“I don’t.”

“Wait, a treasure hunt?” Bev said. She was beaming harder than ever now, her tummy swooping down in excited jolts.

She always read about children going on adventures in old buildings and finding treasure chests in books and she always use to wish it was her with a satchel and magnifying class, walking along empty hallways with a pack of friends. And while she’d grown up a bit, the fun of exploring haunted places had never really left her. So a whole day to do that, with her towers? With the Losers?

Twenty million things were buzzing around her mind and she felt like she could just float right up to the ceiling.

“This is h-h-hands d-down the b-b-best m-moment of my l-l-life.” Bill said.

“You said that like, two days ago.” Eddie said.

“A-a-and?” Bill said. “It w-was then. But h-h-holy shit!”

“I second that!” Richie yelled from the back of the class.

“If we can watch our language please, Mr Denbrough.” Matron said. Bill blushed.

“When do we get to start?” Chloe asked brightly.

“Might as well let you go now.” Matron sighed. “You were due to leave in ten minutes anyway.”

“What’s the prize?” Eric asked.

“That would ruin the surprise of it all.” Matron said. “Now group up and I’ll lead the way.”

Richie Tozier, being led to the start of the trail

“Ok but what I’m trying to say is would it ruin the game if you told us where the first clue was?” Richie said as they followed Matron down the stairs.

“Well not the whole game but—“

“Exactly, so how are we supposed to even get started if we’re just wandering aimlessly around the entire school?” Richie asked.

“You will find out soon enough Richard,” Matron smiled at him, and Richie picked at his hangnail impatiently until it bled. Trickle of red orb glided down his thumb as he looked down at it and wiped it absentmindedly on his white shirt.

They trailed behind her up some more stairs as they recognised to be south and west’s half of the building.

“Man this place brings back memories.” Mike said, shaking his head wistfully.

“Prank wars seems so long ago now.” Ben smiled at the memory.

“We’ve all grown so much as a person since.” Richie put a hand on his heart dramatically. There was a pause before they all snorted.

“Biggest lie of 1984.” Eddie laughed and they all nodded.

It wasn’t exactly the biggest lie, Richie thought. Yes they hadn’t changed barely at all as individual people, apart from appearance wise of course, but as one, Richie wasn’t so sure. As one, they’d all simultaneously grown together, whether that was growing up or down Richie didn’t know that either. But Richie thinks that they all know that, in their own way.

“Now,” Matron stopped them all just outside south and west’s common room. “This is where you all split off into three groups, of which then you decide the matter onwards.” The losers instantly bundled together in a cluster. “Looks like we already have our first group.”

“But that’s not fair! They have a massive group!” Greta whined.

“And that’s not fair because..?” Stan said.

“Because!”

“Greta we are working together, if you hadn’t realised.” Buffy rubbed her eyes in annoyance.

“But still—“

“You literally have nothing to back your point up.” Chloe said. Greta pouted.

“Ok so,” Matron cut in. “One group will head up to the roof of south tower, another along the classrooms along the corridor between east and south. Personally I think the biggest group here should take a wider range of the school and split off into different sections.”

“A wider range of the school? What’s that supposed to mean?” Richie exclaimed.

“Meaning you have the outdoors too.” Matron explained, and Richie sighed.

“Imagine u-u-us doing this in th-the f-f-f-fuh-f-first year here.” Bill grinned.

“We’d be lost before we knew it.” Mike laughed.

“Ok students, off you go.” Matron snapped her fingers, grinned wickedly, and backed into south and west’s common room.

The seventeen were left standing alone.

“What’s she gonna do in there? Jump out the window?” Blake said.

“I sure feel like somethings gonna jump out at us.” Patty checked behind her shoulders, flinching.

“Don’t be such a wuss.” Audra nudged her playfully and Chloe crept up behind Patty and clutched her shoulders, making her squeal and swat Chloe off.

“Hey, guys?” Bev said. “As much as I’m enjoying this, I think Matron going into the common room was our cue to leave.”

“Come on winners, let us descend!” Richie pointed to the air. Nobody moved.

“Winners?” Eddie questioned.

“What? You don’t think we aren’t gonna win this?” Richie raised his eyebrows, catching Greta’s eyes who rolled themselves.

“Fair enough.” Ben said.

“Well then, let us be off!” Richie began down the stairs.

“Good luck guys!” Bev called to the others.

“And remember, someone is always watching you!” Emily called, which made them all stop mid way down the stairs.

“Huh?” Richie yelled.

“I said have fun!” A faint voice called back, which sent them all but running down the stairs.

“Right then,” Mike said once they were on the second floor, also known as the first formers dorm rooms. “Matron said we should split off, so which groups do y’all want to be in.” They were striding down the corridor.

“Since Matron said we needed to cover a wider range, I say some of us go to the sick bay.” Stan said.

“Good thinking, maybe me and you should go there?”

“Seems logical.”

“And maybe once you two have stopped flirting, the rest of us will be able to decide groups too?” Richie stopped to catch his breath, stopping them all outside a rogue art room. Stan turned beetroot red, ready to snap Richie’s neck off while Mike just smiled and shook his head.

“Ok me and Bev could maybe go down some more stairs, like investigate rooms lower or something?” Ben said and blushed immediately. “Obviously, if that’s ok with you Beverly?”

“Why of course, Ben. I am honoured.” She bowed before him, which made Ben blush even brighter.

“That leaves me, Rich, and Bill.” Eddie said. “How did I pull the short straw?”

“H-h-h-hey!” Bill locked Eddie in a head lock, despite Eddie’s complaints.

“I rather think this is a splendid group. They should be happy to have all this in their team.” Richie placed his hands on his hips and posed.

“God right let’s get going before I have to see more of that.” Stan said as he and Mike began to walk to the sick bay.

“Wait, woah, where are we supposed to go?” Eddie called. Richie turned to Ben and Bev who were not there.

“Well sh-sh-shh-sh-shit now what?” Bill asked as they all stood helplessly in the middle of a corridor.

“Hey maybe we could go outside? There’s probably some shit out there that could help us.” Richie suggested.

“Yaayyyy, out in the cold again!!!” Eddie said sarcastically as they began to walk down some more staircases.

“Don’t worry Eds, i’ll keep ya warm.” Richie put his arm around Eddie’s shoulders.

“Don’t call me that.” Eddie pushes his arm off.

“Oh you love it spaghetti.”

“Rich I swear—“

“How come you’re allowed to use nicknames and I’m not?”

“Because mine aren’t stupid.”

“Well personally I think—“

“J-J-J-Jesus I think I w-w-w-was the one who p-pulled the short st-str-s-straw.” Bill laughed, shushing them both.

They tumbled outside and shivered in the cool Halloween breeze.

“It’s all well and good being outside but we don’t even know what we’re looking for.” Richie said.

“Well, Matron said clues, right? So maybe there is a bit of paper with like a riddle or something on it.” Eddie scrunched his brow in thought.

“Oh! M-m-maybe, as we’re outside, s-s-s-suh-something could b-be buried.” Bill said.

“Wait w-“

“Bill you genius! And there could be like a hand underneath the ground with a letter in its hand and blood and everything.” Richie said.

Bill scratched his head and looked around. “Wh-wh-where do you think it’d b-be?”

“Guys—“

“Well let’s think logically here,” Richie nodded to himself. “What has soft soil that is easily dug?”

Bill snapped his fingers. “Garden.”

“You guys seriously think that there could be a buried hand clutching on to a slip of paper which holds a clue to our quest?” Eddie raised his eyebrows doubtfully. Bill and Richie both nodded. Eddie shrugged. “Why not I guess.”

“Well then, it’s settled.” Richie brushed his hands and they all made their way to the Garden.

Once they'd reached it, they were greeted with a stench that could've honestly been death if Richie hadn't spotted the subtle fragrance shifter that was placed on the roof of the green house.

The whole thing was refurbished to look like an entire graveyard, slabs of stone all laying lifelessly on the soft soil. They walked slowly to each one of them, scanning the names on each of them.

Miss Willis.

Jennifer Sanger.

Adrien Mayborn.

Richard Tozier.

Richie blinked and cleaned his glasses.

Richard Tozier.

"What the fuck."

Eddie turned back and joined him, frowning at the stone.

"Rich it's not—"

"That's my fucking name carved on a fucking piece of stone."

"It's not real Richie." Eddie grabbed Richie's arm.

"Why— who would— why would my name be on that gravestone?" Richie squinted at it.

"It's just a p-p-pr-prop Rich," Bill also walked over.

"But that costs good money to carve names into fucking stone what the fUCK?" Richie felt his throat randomly tightening up and he tried to breathe, but all that came out was something that didn't sound too dissimilar to a choked sob. But he wasn't crying, he didn't know what came over him. He guessed he'd just never really thought about it before.

Maybe he should've.

But it wasn't even real, why was he getting himself so worked up about it. He was alive and—

Eddie's hand slid down to Richie's, squeezing it as comfort. Richie found himself weakly squeezing back. "It's not real," Eddie repeated. "Let's move on, come on."

"W-Wait." Bill said, staring down at the ground in earnest. Richie looked at him. "Look, s-s-s-something's in th-th-the ground." He pointed to a slight bump in the grass.

Richie bent down, releasing his grip from Eddie's hand and began digging away at it, Bill reaching down to help him. And there it was, just lying in the ground, was not a hand clutching, but a letter.

"No w-w-way did we j-just predict that." Bill blinked in disbelief. Richie picked it up and looked around the small circle the three had formed as if they were about to summon something.

"Should I open it?"

"Yeah, dipshit. What else would we do with it?" Eddie said and Richie drew in a deep breath. He picked at the paper and nearly tore it open. All that was in it was a type-written 'B'.

"B?" Bill frowned.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Eddie took the paper and read the single letter again.

"B-what? B—"

"Beware!" A sharp whisper spun them all around to the green house, which was now bubbling in stormy smoke.

"Ok, who said that?" Eddie whispered.

"Well it can't have been Bill, too smooth." Richie smirked and dodged Bill's smack.

"Bewaaaaaaare!" The voice hovered.

Richie took an involuntary step back.

Eddie took a shaky look at the muddy piece of paper again. He looked warily up at Richie and Bill. “Do you think that’s what this means?” His voice wavered slightly. “B—“

“BeeWAAARE!” The greenhouse door crashed open and out came a body drenched in blood. The three screeched to the gods and took off out of the garden Richie knew he wouldn’t be wandering in for a long time.

They tore into the closest door they could, panting and speeding up with adrenaline.

Whatever that was, Richie was positive that it wasn’t going to be the first.

Eddie Kaspbrak, lost with only Richie Tozier

Eddie Kaspbrak

“What the fuck was that?” Eddie cried, hand wrapped around Richie’s arm as they ran through the dim corridors and away from the garden doors.

“I have no fucking clue!” Richie screamed back.

They rounded a corner and ran smack bang into a sheet of cobwebs, hung across the two opposite walls.

“SHIT!” Eddie cried, jumping backwards and almost falling.

“Ah, fuck!” Richie said, trying to catch Eddie and wipe the cobwebs off his face at the same time.

Eddie managed to balance himself and stood up properly, removing the fake cobwebs from himself, slightly shakily.

After finding the first clue at the graveyard, him, Richie and Bill had run off, screaming. Eddie had stuck close to Richie but Bill must of taken a wrong turn somewhere because he was no where to be seen

now.

“Do you think we should go back to find Bill?” Eddie asked, turning to face Richie. Richie’s pirate hat fell off as they were running, and now his dark curls were everywhere.

“No, we’d get lost for sure.” Richie said, adjusting his glasses. “Besides, he probably joined up with one of the Losers.”

“Okay.” Eddie breathed. His heart was beating quickly in his chest and if Richie wasn’t there, he probably would of run to the nearest window and tried to escape. In French, the haunted trail had sounded fun (funner than period three, thats for sure) but how he was actually doing it, with hardly any light and distant music playing in the background, Eddie found that all his previous excitement had left.

They could still beat West and South, though. Get the prize first. If Eddie didn’t die of fright before then, that was.

“So where now?” Eddie asked, looking around.

“Beats me.” Richie said. He pointed down the way they came and dragged his finger across the air to the opposite corridor.

“Down there.” He said quietly.

“Okay.” Eddie said, drawing Richie closer to him.

“If we see or hear anything, run.” Richie said.

“Don’t need to tell me twice.”

They both approached the corridor slowly, their shoulders touching.

They walked down it and Richie flipped his torch on, illuminating the passageway.

More cobwebs and plastic spiders, but nothing else.

“Okay.” Richie sighed, relieved.

“Do we just walk on?” Eddie hissed.

“Yeah-“ Richie started, but suddenly fell quiet.

“Richie, what-?” Eddie said, but Richie put a finger to his lips and Eddie listened.

He heard it. The distant, clunking sound of chains.

“What the fuck?” Eddie whispered quietly, his voice wavering.

“It might just be the music.” Richie whispered back.

They both listened for a second longer, and Eddie realised with sinking fear that it was growing louder.

“Richie!” He hissed.

“Okay, okay, okay!” Richie said. “This isn’t even real right, it’s just the teachers all putting on this elaborate halloween trail!”

“Yes!” Eddie said. “And we’re not scared because that would be stupid!”

“Yeah!” Richie agreed. “And we’re-“

Suddenly, a person in grey and white robes with chains covering their body jumped out from the dark space they were just in. Eddie and Richie screamed and ran, Eddie managing to grab Richie’s hands.

“Oh my God, oh my God!”

They rounded a corner, still screaming, and came to a swift halt in front of three doors.

With fast breathing, they took in the words on the door:

Not scary at all, scary, very scary

“Which one?” Richie yelled.

“Not scary!” Eddie said, and the two of them all but threw themselves at the door. Eddie honestly didn’t care that it was just a teacher dressed up to scare them; right then, he was running as fast and far away as he could.

“Ready?” Richie asked.

“Open the fucking door, Rich!” Eddie cried, still squeezing Richie’s hand.

Richie threw it open.

“Can you see anything, Eds?” Richie asked softly.

“No.” Eddie said. “I’ll turn on the light.”

He reached forward, stretching his hand towards the string light. The sound of chains had fallen quiet now, and Eddie prayed it would stay that way.

He tugged, and the space was filled with a dim yellow light. His red sleeve glimmered in it, and he let go of the light slowly.

“Okay.” He whispered. “Okay. This is all okay.”

“We’re okay.” Richie said.

Eddie nodded; “And we can fight anything that tries to tell us otherwise.”

“Okay.” Richie said.

“Okay.” Eddie said.

“Okay.” Richie said.

They stood at the doorway, looking out at the dark space it led into.

“So.” Richie said.

“So.” Eddie said too. Whatever was in front of them, that be stairs or a classroom (it was too dark to properly make out) could be their escape or trap. And Eddie had no idea which one.

“Should we...?” Richie half asked.

“Um.” Eddie said. “Um.”

He and Richie turned to each other, then looked back at the door.

“Yes.” Eddie said. “We’re not fucking pussies.”

“Exactly!” Richie said, making no attempt to let go of Eddie’s hand.

“Okay.” Eddie said for maybe the hundredth time. “Let’s go.”

They both walked in, Eddie first and Richie very close behind. They had only taken a few steps when something spoke from the darkness.

“Who’s there?”

“Oh fuck no.” Eddie breathed, chills rippling up his arms.

“I said, who’s there?” The voice repeated, angrier now.

“Come on.” Richie said, putting an arm around Eddie’s waist. “Let’s-“

“I SAID WHOS THERE!”

The deafening sound of a chainsaw echoed suddenly, and someone (a teacher it’s just a teacher it’s only a) ran towards them dressed up as the Leatherface.

“hOLY FUCK!” Eddie screamed, being half dragged out by Richie. He kicked the door shut and fell against Richie, panting heavily.

“Who... came... up... with... this.” He said, his voice shaky.

“Eds.” Richie said, then fell silent. All they could hear was the soft piano music seemingly coming from below them and their own heart beats.

“No.” Eddie said, suddenly. He stood up properly and pulled Richie up too. “I’m not about to be scared by any more teachers today. I don’t give a shit if twenty fucking mass murders are behind that door, I’m not stopping.”

“Which... which door?” Richie asked.

Eddie turned around and looked at their opinions. Richie turned their flashlight on again and whatever Mrs Wilson had used to paint the

doors reflected in the light.

“Scary.” Eddie said. “I mean, if you think-“

Richie laughed wildly. “I have no fucking clue what I think, Eds.”

“Don’t call me Eds.” Eddie said quietly, walking over to the middle door. Richie was behind him, and both put their hands on the door handle.

“3...2...1...now!”

Both of them pulled the door open and Richie pointed his flashlight down.

“Now!” Eddie screamed. He and Richie rocketed forward, clinging clumsily onto each other as they ran. If there were twenty monsters or ghouls or teachers there, they were running too fast for Eddie to see them.

They stopped only when they reached the end of the classroom. The blinds had been done, and him and Richie ran straight into the window.

“Oof!” Richie breathed as he fell to the ground, the air being knocked out of him.

“Rich?” Eddie mumbled, holding his face from where it impacted the glass.

“I’m good!” Richie said. He’d dropped his flashlight on the floor, and it’s beam illuminated the side of the window.

Eddie got up and pulled the blinds up, blinking in the sudden daylight. He looked around at the room, and was able to breathe properly.

It was just a classroom in the light. With the normal wooden tables and chairs he sat on everyday to have class and with the normal blackboard on the wall and normal bookcase in the corner. And now, with sunlight falling over them, the fake cobwebs just looked... well, fake.

“Man.” Richie said, getting up.

“Man.” Eddie agreed. He walked over to Richie’s flashlight when he saw two pieces of paper pinned up to the wall.

“Hey, Rich?” He said. Richie turned around and saw where Eddie was pointing.

He walked over and took one down, then showed it to Eddie.

A giant ‘O’ was written on in black ink.

“That’s a fucking disappointing prize.” Eddie said.

Richie looked at it again, shrugged, then handed it to Eddie. He took the final one down and read it.

“The next place you need to go,
is where the sick and ill stay.”

“The sick bay?” Eddie said. “But aren’t Stan and Mike already there?”

“I guess.” Richie said. “He looked back at the O. “I think we collect letters and make a word, and then go there. Maybe we shouldn’t of split up.”

“You fucking think?” Eddie said. He took off his devil horns and held them in his left hand. “Where to now?”

“Let’s try and find the others.” Richie said. “Hope they’ve been more lucky than us.”

Eddie agreed, and the two of them went back the way they came, hands held the entire time back.

Mike Hanlon, with Stan Uris on the way to the Sick Bay

“You know, when you think about it, they’re just costumes.” Mike said, reassuring himself as much as anything.

He and Stan had chosen to go look for whatever clues they were

messing to find in the sick bay, and Mike really didn't know what to expect. Would the beds be covered in blood? Would there be a body bag? Worse yet a body bag with a body in it covered in blood? All these options Mike never would've dreamed of happening in any school let alone a boarding school melted into his brain. It was extremely intoxicating and rather annoying.

"You think we'll see Mrs Wilson at all?" Stan said, walking closely next to Mike as they climbed the stairs to whatever would be greeting them.

"Maybe, it's not like we'd recognise her anyway if she's doused in blood or something." Mike said. Stan shivered slightly.

They arrived at the sick bay door which seemed to be looking normal enough, spooking Mike all the more. Maybe they didn't want to decorate the sick bay in case people actually needed to use the place. Maybe there would be no clues at all in there and they would've scared themselves for no good reason—

Stan twisted the door handle slowly, the creak echoing loudly in the empty halls. He looked at Mike before pushing open the door.

There wasn't a lot different about the room, apart from blood leaking from the top of the window into a bucket, creating a soft tapping sound ever five seconds.

Mike shook his head. "Uh uh, nope, don't like that."

"Ok uh, let's think." Stan took a deep breath and furrowed his brows. "Well, as well as we can with that annoying ass dripping noise."

Mike looked over to the beds, seeing white sheets draping loosely off them. That was the first real weird thing, if you don't count the white cobwebs or dripping blood. Matron would never leave a bed unmade.

Mike blinked hard. The fact he was thinking about Matron making beds instead of the task at hand was beyond him.

"Clues. Where would clues be? In the file cupboard?" Stan walked over to the shelf and pulled a random drawer. "Would be han-hAND HAND A FUCKING HAND FUCK FUCK—" Before Mike could warn

him of the possible things that were most likely hiding in their, Stan yelped and slammed it shut, rushing back over to Mike. “When I say it’d be handy, I didn’t mean literally.” He shuddered.

“Ok, well, where else would you hide pieces of paper?” Mike fiddled with his thumbs nervously.

“Under the beds maybe?” Stan suggested, pointing towards them. “I’ll leave you to that one.”

“Stanley Uris, your generosity holds no bounds.” Mike let out a half chuckle which surprised him since he was close to fucking all and legging it out the window. He breathed. “Nothing’s real, it’s all costume, fake blood, probably some melted sugar coiled to look like cob web.” Mike told himself as he approached. “Yeah, probably just some sugar they needed to get rid of that was from the nineteen sixties—“

Mike stopped his ramble and began to lift the duvet cover slowly. Mike let out a sigh of relief. “See? Nothing to worry about—“

Suddenly the bucket tipped over apparently by itself, sending a stream of blood surrounding Stan. He looked at Mike in alarm, though his eyes just missed Mike, looking just beyond his shoulders. Mike frowned at turned around.

Eddie had some competition with the high pitch screaming.

Mike lurched towards Stan in one huge step and grabbed onto him, tight. The body shook violently as its masked face sat up, tilting its head at the two.

“What are you looking for?” It hissed.

“Uh- um-“ Mike stammered, he, too, shaking uncontrollably. It’s not real it’s not real it’s not real it’s notreal not real nOT REAL—

“W-we’re um,” Stan spoke up shakily. “Uh looking for a uh clue.”

“Cluuuuue?” The body sang.

“That’s what I said, yes.”

“What you seek isn’t as far as you think.” The gravelly voice seemed to warn.

“We were hoping so—“

“Sh.” Mike put a hand to his lips to shush Stan.

“Wh—“

Mike pointed behind the figure at the wall behind it. On it, and Mike didn’t know how he hadn’t seen it before, was a piece of ripped paper taped to the wall. Stan raised his eyebrows and nodded. Both of them telepathically asking each other, ‘how do we get it?’.

“Hey, mask face!” Mike shouted, really questioning why. The figure flinched towards Mike and he stepped back slightly. “Did you know, pigs often run to their food blindly? They sorta just smell something good and head for it.” The masked person tilted their head. Meanwhile Stan mouthing ‘the fuck-?’.

“Now that I have your attention, I suggest you come my way because I noticed a, uh, a crack in the wall.” Mike said, pointing behind the file cabinet. The body rose. “Yeah, it also looks like it’s burning!”

The monster- Mike did not care if it was a teacher dressed up, hurried from the bed and Mike signalled ‘Now!’ to Stan and Stan suddenly caught on to what was going on and grabbed the the paper and legged it for the door.

It suddenly turned to Mike and hissed. “There’s no fire.”

“Ya think?” Mike swallowed thickly, trying to keep his demeanour calm. “See ya!” He ran to the door and slammed it shut, his heart beating at one hundred miles per hour.

“Pigs? Really?” Stan laughed shakily, beginning to open up the letter.

“I could’ve gone on about facts of cows but I didn’t want to offend them too bad.” Mike shrugged.

Stan opened it up and frowned at the words. Or lack there of.

"I?" Stan flipped the paper around to see if there was possibly anything else to give an explanation.

"The heck is that supposed to mean?" Mike rubbed his head in thought. I...m gonna kill you? I...just wanna get out of this damn costume because it's hot? I—

"I guess you must be wondering what this means." The voice slivered through the cracks under the door. Mike jumped and Stan almost dropped the paper.

"Um y-yeah—"

"In this land it's not what you find, but in the depths you'll reach the line." It riddled, sending shivers up Mike's spine.

"In the depths you'll reach the line..? Yeah real thanks for the help mask guy!" Stan snapped.

"Wait no that could make sense..." Mike thought for a moment. "In this land- meaning Whitmore," he began.

"And in the depths, meaning somewhere on the ground floor? Mmm no depths meaning...where?" Stan began to catch on.

"Maybe there is somewhere lower than the ground floor." Mike suggested. The both looked at each other before Stan snapped his fingers, making Mike jump more than it should have.

"Basement." They both said.

"I had no idea Whitmore had a basement." Stan shook his head at himself.

"Not gonna lie I barely knew Whitmore had a garden until like two weeks ago." Mike said, making them both laugh easily.

And just when Mike thought they'd finished with the scaring for the time being, the patter of water into a bucket sounded again and blood seeped out under the door onto the floor in front of them.

They began to descend.

And quickly.

Ben Hansom

“Where to now?” Ben whispered. Bev was walking close next to him, and they were both being as quiet as possible.

“The quickest way to the hall would be the staircase in the West wing, I think.” Bev said.

“Right.” Ben said, running his flashlight across the hall. “So, right?”

“Yeah.” Bev said.

They began to walk, Ben close enough to Bev to hear her soft breathing. They’d broken off from the Losers ten minutes ago, after deciding who would go where, and him and Bev had split off together. They decided to go to the Hall, which seemed the second most likely place a clue would be after the Sick Bay, which Mike and Stan had taken.

It was creepily quiet, not even the sound of other students in the air. Ben kept expecting to run into someone from West or South, and he was silently hoping they would. It would take the edge off everything, anyway.

But no one from West or South was around. No one from East or North, either. And that was scaring Ben the most.

“You know, Whitmore really do know how to scare you.” He said, voice shaking more than he wanted it to.

“Sure do, Keed.” Bev said, and they fell quiet again.

Their footsteps seemed to echo as they headed to the stairs in West’s wing, leading all the way down to the ground floor.

“You want-“ Bev said, but stopped suddenly. Ben knew why- there was suddenly another set of footsteps, these ones loud and fast.

“Someone’s coming.” Bev said quietly. Without thinking about it, Ben raised his torch.

The footsteps approached faster and Ben got ready to attack or scream when Bill came into the wavering light from Ben's torch.

"Bill?" Ben and Bev said together.

"Oh, th-th-thank fuck!" Bill said, hurrying over to them. "I th-th-thought I l-l-lost all o-of y-y-you."

"Where are Richie and Eddie?" Bev asked.

"I d-d-don't know." Bill said. "Wev r-r-ran in d-d-different d-d-d-directions."

"Oh, Frick." Ben muttered lowly.

Bev looked at them both with a set face and went down the stairs. Ben went after, and Bill followed.

The h-h-hall, r-r-right?" Bill asked, slipping down the stairs.

"Yeah." Ben said. They had reached the bottom now, and were walking in a three down the dark hallway. "I think-"

But before he could tell Bill what he thought, someone dressed up as a mummy jumped out serval feet infant of them, screaming.

"Ahhhhhhh!" Ben screamed, doing an aggressive double-take and almost blinding Bill.

"You wanna fight?" Bev screamed. "I will FIGHT YOU-"

"B-b-b-b-bev." Bill panted, trying to hold her back.

The poor teacher who was dressed up seemed to consider their options then hurry back the way they came, leaving the three of them alone again.

"Jesus." Ben said, hand over his heart.

"B-b-bev, you c-can't." Bill said, still holding Bev back.

"Yeah?" Bev asked. "Try me."

“So.” Ben said, clapping his hands. “That was a lovely experience but should we get moving?”

“Y-y-yes.” Bill said, dropping Bev’s arms and standing a safe distance away from her.

They walked on again, close enough to each other so they could grab hands and run if needed. Ben was immensely grateful that both Bev and Bill were there with him; if they weren’t, he felt sure he would of shit his pants by now.

“We’re here.” Bev said from in front. “Are you all okay?”

“I’m g-good.” Bill said.

“I think so.” Ben said. “Just, yanno, scared shitless.”

Bev laughed a bit, but before she could say anything more, dainty piano music started up.

“W-w-what-“ Bill started, but Bev put a finger over her lips to silence him and opened the door a crack.

The music grew louder and the three of them stuck their head round the door like a scene from a children’s Tv show.

In the center of the Hall was a piano, the one their music teacher would sometimes play at the end of Term Assembly. Except it wasn’t their music teacher today, unless she’d had an extreme makeover.

“It’s Dracula.” Ben said softly.

“God, since when did Whitemore have so many costumes?” Bev said, getting a gentle whack from Bill.

“Shhhh!” He said. “O-or h-h-he’ll s-suck o-our b-b-blood.”

“Bill, you realise this isn’t real, right.” Bev said, making no attempt to be quiet.

“Wh-wh-who kn-knows.” Bill said.

"I do?" Bev said.

"Okay!" Ben said, louder than both of them. "Let's just get out of here and try somewhere else for the next clue."

"Wait!" Bev said. She peered around the door again and let out a ever so polite. "Shit."

"What's wrong?" Ben asked.

"The clues," Bev explained. "They're at the back of the hall."

"Oh, well that's fantastic!" Ben said.

"H-h-how are w-we supposed to g-g-get to them w-without b-being k-k-killed?" Bill asked.

"We're not-" Bev said, but Ben coughed to silence them both.

"That's the whole point of it." He said when Bev and Bill were looking at him with only mild looks of confusion. "We have to try and get it without the dude knowing."

"D-d-dude." Bill giggled.

"Right." Bev said, swinging around to look again. "Right, okay."

"So I say we have a plan-" Ben started, before Bev darted through the door.

"B-b-bev!" Bill said. "C-cover your n-n-neck!"

"Guys, wait!" Ben said, and followed them both through the doors.

He made sure the door shut softly before remembering it was a swing through door and caught up with the few steps Bev and Bill had walked.

"This is stupid!" Ben whispered as quietly as he could. Dracula was now only a few feet to Ben's right, and as the three of them edged forward, there were a few seconds when they were directly behind him.

It was then when Ben didn't care if it was real or not- right then, it SEEMED real, and that was good enough for him.

"Can we hurry it up?" He breathed into Bill's ear.

"Mm." Bill gulped, and nudged Bev. She looked over, saw their urgency, and started to tip-toe quicker to the table. As soon as they were past Dracula, Ben felt his breath ease.

Bev darted forward to the table and snatched up the two pieces of paper.

"Got 'em!" She whispered.

"What do they say?" Ben asked.

"N-no." Bill said. "The v-vampire w-will h-h-hear us a-and s-s-suck our b-b-blood."

"No he won't." Bev hissed. She unfolded the paper, much to Bill's distress, and read them in a low voice masked by the piano music.

"The final clue is at the bottom of the school, where shelves line the walls."

"B-b-bottom of the s-s-s-school?" Bill whispered.

"Like the basement?" Ben said.

"Yes." Bev whispered, nodding her head. "The basement."

"O-o-okay, let's l-l-leave now-" Bill said.

"Wait, the letter!" Bev said. She unfolded the other piece of paper, making Ben wince with the noise, and flashed them the last letter.

"E." Ben said, reading it. "E?"

"I don't know-" Bev said, but stopped, eyes wide. Ben realised why, and Bill did after a good ten seconds.

The piano music had stopped.

“Wha-“ Ben said, but he lost the words.

The seat of the piano creaked as the teacher dressed as Dracula turned around.

“Hello.” He said, his voice echoing around the hall.

Several things happened then; Bill screamed and started to run across the hall, Bev began to yell a series of insults, and two people from South decided to show up.

As a result, Bill ran smack bang into one of them, as Bev called Dracula a series of names that Ben’s ears gasped at.

“Bev-“ Ben said, taking her hand and leading her to Bill and the two very confused looking South Girls.

“I WILL FIND YOUR BAT FAMILY-!” Bev bellowed as Ben took her out the door.

“Is she good?” A girl from South with wavy blond hair asked.

“Fine.” Ben huffed. He watched with a smiling face as the two girls went through the door into the hall then looked for Bill.

But Bill wasn’t there.

“Bev, where’s Bill?” Ben asked.

Bev took a breath, seemed to snap back into reality, and scanned the hallway as if expecting Bill to appear out of thin air.

“I don’t know.” She said. “I didn’t see him.”

Ben bit his lip and looked around. If Bill wasn’t there or in the hall, it meant they had lost him.

Again.

Bill Denbrough, running blindly around Whitmore

All he knew, was that he didn't stop running.

Bill vaguely knew when to turn so that he didn't fly into a wall but that was about it. He just kept running. What spurred him on even more was the fact that this creepy ass piano music kept playing and playing everywhere he turned. They must have some damn good speakers here, Bill thought.

He rounded a corner and almost fell down the stairs in fright as he bombed straight into Mike and Stan, who were sliding down the stairs hurriedly.

"Jesus fuck Bill!" Stan almost yelled and grabbed onto the rail. "What are you doing here?"

"Aren't you supposed to be with Richie and Eddie?" Mike frowned. See if anyone else had said that, they probably would've meant it with deep offence, but Mike rarely neither would or could do that.

"L-l-l-long story." Bill retied his shoe laces which untied themselves while he was running aimlessly from anything and everything.

"No please, talk as much as you want. This piano music is killing me." Mike shook his head as they began to head down the stairs Bill had just raced up.

"W-w-well," Bill explained how he'd pretty much ran the entirety of the school, in which Mike shivered involuntarily and Stan just picked at the loose hem of his cloak which seemed to extremely bother him. Stan had taken off the beard and hat and apparently abandoned them somewhere.

Bill had flung off his sheet when he went to the garden earlier on, becoming way too hot, his hair dancing around crazily on his head.

"Glad to know we aren't the only ones getting scared." Stan said grimly as they went down many more flights of stairs.

They reached the ground floor and searched around for a while, Bill not really registering what they were doing and just happy to have some more company.

“H-h-Hey uh, where a-are we g-g-g-guh-g-going?” Bill asked.

“Basement.” Mike said.

“Oh y-y-yeah, totally f-forgot about that.” Bill recalled what Bev and Ben’s letter said. “You n-n-nuh-know, I had no idea th-that Whitmore had a basement.”

“Yeah me neither, I mean what else could they possibly put in there? A water park?” Mike said.

“I-imagine! With l-l-l-like a fountain and little ice c-c-cr-c-cream bars and—“

Mike gasped. Stan whipped around to see what was up. “A pizza bar!” Stan groaned.

“And swings and slides and—“

“Will you guys kindly shut the frick up before I make you?” Stan asked, stopping outside what looked like the basement door.

“Frick? When did you ever say that?” Mike questioned.

“Since now because there is a good chance there will be teachers in there.” He hissed.

Bill shrugged. “F-f-f-fair enough.”

Mike stepped forward and drew in a deep breathe, placing a hand on the door handle. “Y’all ready?”

“As we’ll ever be.” Stan replied honestly, and Mike pushed open the door.

In it were larges bookshelf looking walls, towering to the ceiling and blocking certain pathways like a maze.

“You know, I have a strange feeling I’m not gonna like this.” Stan cringed at the room, which was also overly decorated. After all, it was Halloween.

“Me too.” Mike said quietly.

“Me three.” A whisper came from their right, and suddenly the door slammed behind them.

“Oh f-f-fuck that.” Bill whispered, and backed into the maze.

“Bill stop moving or we’ll lose each other, dipshh-elfish!” Stan caught up with him and he Mike and bill set off into the unknown.

“So um, what are we actually meant to find down here?” Mike whispered.

“I don’t know. All I know is we were told to go down here.” Stan said.

They rounded a corner into a dead end.

“Well th-th-that’s annoying.”

“This way!” Mike pointed to the left and they picked up to a jog. Suddenly books were sent flying off shelves behind them, Bill turning around so quick he was positive he got whiplash.

“Ew.” Stan blinked.

“So m-muh-m-m-much for a w-w-water Park.” Bill groaned as they wandered on.

“Hey guys!” Mike shouted. “I think there’s a note!” He took a corner with Bill close behind. Just as he were about to snatch it off the wall a vampire looking thing jumped out and sent them screaming down corners left right and centre.

“You think they invest in all the these outfits?” Mike panted as they stopped at a dead end. He looked around. “Hey where’s Stan?”

Bill turned to see no one but an empty maze. “Sh-sh-shit.”

“Stan!” Mike began to back out of the dead end, looking left and right and legging for it. “STAN!”

“Mike w-w-w-wuh-wait up!” Bill scampered after him.

“Stan where the heck are you?” Mike yelled. They went around about eight rights and thirteen lefts and walked straight for a good five minutes before Mike kicked a bookshelf in frustration.

“Mike its f-f-fine. They’re t-teachers they aren’t g-g-g-g-gonna hurt him.” Bill breathed shakily as footsteps seemed to be coming from everywhere. “I say w-we just get th-th-the envelope and wait b-b-by the door.”

“I would say a great idea,” Mike said. “But I have approximately zero clue where the paper or door has gone.”

“...ah yes.”

“Welp, I guess we better start looking. Can’t be that big right?” Mike said reassuringly.

“Whitemore is b-b-b-basically a castle.”

“Shh.”

They walked, and walked, and walked, and walked some more, ducking in and out of cobwebs every so often but still walking.

“How the hell did we get so lost?” Mike scratched his head.

“I’ve l-literally forgotten what c-c-c-ci-civilisation is at this point.” Bill moaned.

“Don’t be stupi— aGH!” Mike shrieked as the eighteenth book fell off its shelf. “The hell was that.”

“Th-th-that would be a book.”

“Guys?” I distant call sounded.

Mike perked up. “Stan?”

“Mike?!” It called again, a little louder. “Bill? Where are you guys?”

“F-f-f-follow our voices.” Bill said, and started singing loudly, well,

screeching loudly. “oHHHHH SANDIE BAAAAABIEEEEE—

“Bill. Stop.” Stan turned the corner and rushed over to them. “My god I never wanna get lost again.”

“B-because you missed u-u-us?” Bill smirked.

“Because I never wanna hear you sing like that again.” Stan said. Mike hugged him rapidly, letting out a sigh of relief.

“Jesus, right, we’ve been down here for a solid hour now.” Mike let him go. “Let’s get that damn note shall we?”

“But h-h-h-how?” Bill asked.

“I have a plan.” Stan said, determined.

He explained the plan and began to lead them to the letter. Turns out they weren’t that far away from it when they stopped for the sixth time, literally a left and they would’ve been there.

“Ok,” Mike whispered. “You ready?”

“Less than I was when you asked earlier on,” Stan said. And Mike nodded and quickly ran off to the door, thanks to Stan’s navigation skills.

“Right, let’s go.” Stan strolled forward, Bill walking to the left, parallel to Stan, and watching through the cracks of the shelves.

Just as Stan reached for it, the monster thing jumped out again and this time; Stan elegantly jumped back as Bill pushed it out the way. Stan grabbed for the note. He set for the door with Bill not far behind.

Once they reached it they all sped out of the basement door and slammed it behind them.

“Right then what’s this.” Stan opened it and, once again, there was a letter. “L?”

“Lord let’s not make this mistake again, I think is what it means.”

Mike said.

Bill laughed, and wished he'd never have to go through a maze like that ever again in his life.

Stan Uris, at the bottom of Whitemore

"Okay." Mike said, backing quickly out of the basement door, Bill to his left and Stan to his right.

"Okay." Stan said. "That was not terrifying."

"No." Mike said, kicking the door shut and stumbling back. "Not at-"

"Guys?"

"Ahhhhh!" Mike, Stan and Bill all scream, rounding on the voice.

"Woah, calm down!" Chloe said, throwing her arms up. "It's just us!"

Stan sighed and rested on Mike's shoulder. Since whatever that was that had chased them out of the basement had gone, Stan had the strong feeling that someone was watching him.

They had the clues, though. So at least Stan hadn't almost shit his pants for nothing.

"You found anything?" Emily asked, poking her head around Buffy. Stan noticed that their hands were clasped.

"L-I-letters." Bill said.

"Us too." Alison said, hands on hips.

"Well, no shit." Greta muttered.

"Guys!" Another voice called, and the rest of North and East came into the light.

"Are we all here?" Stan asked.

"Where's the rest of your group?" Eric asked.

“Right here!” Bev said, her, Ben, Richie and Eddie hurrying over.

“All 16 of us here?” Stan asked.

“17.” Sandie piped up.

Stan let out a breath he didn’t even realise he was holding. Knowing where everyone was rolled a giant weight off his shoulders.

“If we put all our letters together,” Ben said. “I think it will give us the prize.”

“Very smart of it.” Richie joked.

“Shut up, Richie!” Eddie said.

“Okay, wait, I’m confused-“ Blake said.

“Aren’t you always?” Greta snapped.

“Don’t be a bitch, Greta.” Buffy said.

“Oh, so it’s my fault now?” Greta said.

“It’s someone’s fault-?” Bev said.

“We just need to look at the letters!”

“How the fuck are we going to get out of here?”

“Someone could be watching us right now!”

“Can everyone stop screaming for ONE SECOND!” Stan yelled.

Silence fell and Stan had never been more grateful. All they needed to do was unscrambled the word, find their prize, then get the fuck out of there.

“Everyone who has a letter, give them to me.” Mike said, holding out his hand.

Silently, Emily, Eric and Richie dropped their squares of paper into Mike’s palm.

“Okay.” Stan said. “Let’s work this out.”

Him and Mike bent down, at least five torches being shone on them. Mike put the letters in a line and him and Stan studied them.

E B R I L O

“What the f-f-fuck.” Bill said.

“I second that.” Patty said.

“We have to unscramble it first.” Bev said patiently.

“Yeah, so get a fucking move on.” Greta said. “I can feel my hair becoming damp.”

Everyone’s heads turned to look at her.

“What?”

“Okay.” Stan said, looking back down at the letters. “Any ideas?”

Bill leaned down and shuffled them around.

O L I R B E

He stood up again and wiped his hands on his jeans.

“What did that do, exactly?” Stan said, looking up at him.

“I p-p-put them b-b-backwards.” Bill said.

Stan blinked.

“Wait.” Mike said. He moved them around carefully, sliding them across the floor gently with his finger. Stan watched closely.

B O I L E R

“Mike, you’re a goddam genius!” Richie said.

“Not really-“ Mike said, but Bev interrupted him.

“Does that mean the boiler room?” She asked.

“Probably.” Mike shrugged.

“Then let’s go.” Stan said, getting up. The boiler room was just down the left from the basement. He’d only been there once, last year, when Richie and Eddie had somehow broken their Dorm’s radiator and Stan went down with Matron to help her.

They started off in a line, Stan and Mike leading and Ben at the rear. The set of 17 footsteps echoed, and if West and South hadn’t already figured out it was down here, they probably would from the rack they were making.

“Okay.” Stan said, when they rounded to the door. North and East pooled behind him and he heard Chloe doing a head count under her breath. “Should we all go in?”

“Is the room big enough?” Alison asked.

“I mean-“ Stan started.

“You know what, we’ll find out.” Buffy said. “Move.”

Stan did so, opening the door quickly. The room was silent, and Mike switched on the light.

“Is anything in there?” Eddie hissed. “Any dead bodies?”

“Not that I can see.” Stan said. He studied the room quickly and his eyes fell on the shelf that stood in the right corner, opposite the boilers. On the middle shelf was a white envelope, a candle next to it.

“I think we found the prize.” Stan said, grin spreading across his lips.

“Well, go get it then!” Greta said.

Stan walked foreword and picked up the envelope. He flipped it over and saw “Happy Halloween, winners!” written neatly in black ink.

“It’s looks nice.” Stan reported.

“What’s inside?” Patty asked.

“I’m not sure.” Stan said. He traced his finger over the fold. “Should I open-“

“Yes!” Everyone cried.

Stan did so, careful not to rip the flap.

“What does it say, Stan?” Bev asked.

Stan turned it upside down and shook it, but nothing fell out.

“It’s empty.” He said, puzzled.

“Are you sure?” Eddie asked.

“Yea-“ Stan said, but suddenly a hand shot out of the darkness and grabbed his wrist. Stan shrieked, and jumped into the shelves.

“Trick or treat!” The person said, and Mrs Wilson stepped into the light.

“Oh-“ Stan said, feeling as if he’d just gotten off the worlds longest roller coaster ride.

“Ms?” Ben said. “Are you...alright?”

“Quite alright, thank you Mr Hanscom.” Mrs Wilson said brightly.

She looked back at Stan and handed him another envelope. He took his shakily and opened it. This one did have something in it.

“Tickets for the cinema!” Mrs Wilson told the scarred children. “You’ll get a day off soon and all off you can pick what Movie you want to see!”

“An off timetable day!” Bev said, completely unfazed by the last hour or so. “Ace!”

“Definitely!” Mrs Wilson agreed. Stan wondered if he was going to faint.

“Can we... I mean, is this over?” He asked weakly.

“Oh yes, I think so.” Mrs Wilson said, slipping out her vampire teeth. “Come now, I’ll lead you back. It’s the third years slot next, anyway.”

“I’ll keep them in my memories.” Eddie said under his breath.

Stan joined the losers at the back of the line and followed the trail of North and East back into the side of the school that hadn’t been done over for the haunted trail.

It was bright, and Stan squinted in the sudden daylight.

“Wasn’t that fun?” Mrs Wilson said, dropping them off at their Common Room.

“Yep!” Mike said, leaning heavily on Stan.

“Well, you have a while before your next class starts so make the most of it.” Mrs Wilson said.

“That music is still ringing in my ears.” Buffy groaned. “How did you manage to project that horrible piano music over the whole school?”

Mrs Wilson stopped at the door, and turned around. “You mean Mr Moon? He’d rather brilliant as Dracula, I must agree, but I didn’t realise he played so loud.”

“What?” Buffy said. “No, not him. The heavy sounding piano music. At the start? Me and Em heard it.”

Mrs Wilson’s eyebrows crumpled. “I don’t know what music you mean.”

“Me and Rich heard it too.” Eddie said. He was sitting on the arm of the sofa, arms crossed. “Before we went into the doors, I remember hearing it playing.”

“I heard it too.” Stan said. It was just after the seven of them split; he and Mike had been walking to the Sick Bay and he remembered thinking how creepy it sounded.

Mrs Wilson shook her head. "You must of spooked yourselves out. There was no music." She checked her watch and then smiled at them. "I must run now. Happy Halloween!"

She left, shutting the door behind her.

North and East looked at each other, uneasily.

"Are we spooked?" Bev asked.

"I don't know." Mike said. "But I'm not crazy, not yet. I heard music."

"So did I." Richie said.

"All of us did." Eric said. "I remember."

They looked at each other, wide eyes. And for a moment, a second, Stan swears he hears far off piano music.

Spooked.

Notes for the Chapter:

now the plot really gets moving

12. Act Three, Scene Five; Shut up, we're having a moment!

Summary for the Chapter:

Richie comes out, Ben gets kissed and Bill gets crushed

Ben Hanscom, in his Dorm

It was roughly three days after the Halloween hunt, and Ben was still hearing noises. It wasn't so much the creepy music that seemed to be haunting them, but more like loud shuffling.

Ben cracked an eye open and saw Richie's bed side lamp on, Richie's silhouette bending over something.

"Richie?" Ben croaked as he sat up, rubbing his eyes.

"Haystack, you're awake." Richie didn't look up.

"And you are because..?" Ben squinted.

"Oh, I'm writing Eddie's card." Richie replied.

Ben blinked slowly. "Card."

Richie looked at him. "Card." He agreed. "I've been trying to draw this thing since like 4am—"

"Wait card! Eddie's birthday, of course." Ben shook his head at himself, surprised at how one night of sleep could've made him forget all about it. You see, yesterday the 17 had collectively, of course apart from Eddie, had not so much forgotten about it but simply had replaced it in their brains, given the upcoming show and all that.

So, since they hadn't gone to town since Halloween, they thought, 'hey, why not the cinema day be on Eddie's birthday?' And so they asked Mrs Wilson and unsurprisingly she said yes.

"Didn't you finish your card yesterday?" Ben spoke quietly.

“Yeah, just adding the finishing touches.” Richie grinned at the card and Ben smiled. He licked the envelope shut. “We should wake the others up.”

“I’ll get east?” Ben got up, his feet finding their way into the slippers.

“Gosh Ben, you’re a bloody mind reader!” Richie said in a British accent, and Ben shook his head, chuckling.

He slid out of his dorm, heading across the corridor to East’s, dodging the creak in the floor boards every three steps.

He barricaded into the dorm, ripping duvets off peoples body’s despite their annoyed complaints and words that Ben would quite frankly never repeat to his mother.

“Jesus Christ Ben it’s like two am!” Buffy groaned into her pillow.

“Five thirty actually, but—“

“I expect someone like Bill or Stan to do this but you Ben? That was practically assault.” Bev wiped her mouth as she sat up, Ben looking down slightly.

“Well he has good reason to, huh? Eddie’s birthday!” Sandie grinned, throwing her hair up into the messiest buns Ben had ever seen, and yet somehow it still looked somewhat elegant.

“Now come on, Richie’s waking the rest up.” Ben hurried them out the door.

“Surprised we cant here it from here.” Chloe snorted.

They all sped back to North’s dorm room and slipped into the room who was now conscious and buzzing.

“Wait, Eddie’s not even awake yet?” Audra asked, being shushed immediately as they surrounded Eddie’s bed as he slept soundly.

“Guys, I don’t mean to be boring but, uh, this is a tad creepy.” Eric looked around at them all.

“I second that.” Greta steps back.

“No, shh, ready?” Richie said. “Three...”

“Wait what’s happening?” Sandie asked suddenly.

“Two.”

“On one we all just scream loudly.” Mike explained, and she nodded.

“One.” The room broke off into manic screaming and yelling and what sounded like demonic singing, maybe even some crying in there. Who knows.

Eddie bolted up suddenly. “What the FUCK? GuYS WE ARE BEING ROBBED THERES A ROBBERY—“ he suddenly looked around and frowned. “Oh.”

“Happy birthday Eddie!” Bev squealed and gave him a massive hug, Eddie barely being conscious enough to return it.

“You guys remembered?” Eddie smiled slightly, not being able to help himself.

“Why of course spaghetti!” Richie launched his card at Eddie.

“Could’ve done with you forgetting about spaghetti.” Eddie muttered, but didn’t seem too bothered. He smiled at the stack of makeshift cards that were piling at his lap. “Guys you really didn’t have to—“

“Eddie shut up, we don’t allow modesty on birthdays.” Stan said, grinning.

“And of c-c-c-course we cant f-forget the last s-s-s-surprise.” Bill said.

Eddie placed the cards neatly on his bedside table. “Surprise?”

“Yep.” Emily smiled.

“How do you feel about going to town today?” Mike raised his brows.

“Town? On a school day?” Eddie gasped excitedly.

“Not just that,” Ben said. “We’re going to the cinema!”

Eddie knitted his eyebrows. “But I thought that wasn’t until next week?”

“Ah you know, pulled a few strings here and there, did a couple of deeds. The usual.” Richie shrugged.

“He means we spoke to Mrs Wilson,” Bev explained. “And she said that we could go especially for your birthday.”

Ben knew this must have been extremely new for Eddie, having a mother of whom is spawn of the devil herself. And it honestly made his heart hurt every time he thought about it. But he was here now. They all were. And they would be going to the cinema in a not too distant future for one of the funnest days in their life.

“Get your party pants on Eds, because we’re going to town.”

Richie Tozier, at the entrance doors

“Ready?” Richie, slipping his jacket on.

“Hell yes!” Bev said, grinning.

The lunch bell had rung ten minutes ago, and the whole of North and East were blotted at the main entrance. Excited chatter hung around the room as people slipped on boots and coats, protecting themselves for the walk to the town in the cold November weather.

That jittery feeling that children feel waiting in line for a flashing rollercoaster ride was consuming Richie as he waited to be let out. A whole day away from lessons on Eddie’s Birthday was like winning the fucking lottery, and Richie couldn’t stop moving. He was like a surge of electric energy that had nothing to power up; currently, he was bouncing on his feet, talking a mile-a-minute about anything that rolled into his mind. It was annoying, but it was also jumping to each of them.

Everyone was excited, happiness blushing their cheeks. There was already talk of going into the town after the movie to get food, if Mrs

Wilson let them.

“This is gonna be so cool!” Eddie said, hugging a jacket to himself.

“What I wouldn’t give to see West and South’s stupid faces!” Bev said.

“Probably sour as lemons.” Mike said.

“S-s-sour as l-l-lemons?” Bill said, laughing openly.

“Mike’s getting in extra English practice.” Eddie said.

“Yeah, trying to impress our teacher, Mikey?” Richie said, tipping him an over exaggerated wink.

“Ugh, beep beep.” Stan said. He had binoculars strung around his neck and had been talking seriously to Ben about trying to see any birds on the way down.

“Can’t beep beep me on Eddie’s birthday.” Richie said.

“Who the fuck made that rule?” Eddie said.

“Me, spaghetti.” Richie said. “You’d miss my voice to much.”

“Yeah, we wouldn’t have our daily dose of crappy jokes.” Ben said, and they all laughed.

“Are you all ready?” A booming voice asked, and Matron came over. She was holding a chain of rusty looking keys in her hands, almost the size of her palm.

“Yes!” Everyone cried.

“All going to behave yourselves?” Matron asked, nearing the doors.

“Yes!”

“All going to be back before seven?” Matron asked.

“You know I wouldn’t miss our nightly- OUCH!” Richie said, getting a sharp (and painful) kick from Stan to his knee.

“You do want to go, don’t you Richie?” Matron said, unlocking the doors. “Because if not, you’re welcome to spend the night washing the Sick Bay floors.”

“No, I want to go!” Richie said. “I’m sorry.”

“That’s what I thought.” Matron said. North and East made a messy line by the massive doors.

“Come on, come on, come on-“ Bev was whispering under her breath, almost as jittery as Richie.

“Stick together and be back by seven.” Matron said. She threw the doors open and smiled. “Off you go.”

She might as well of raised one of those little flags people use to start a race, Richie thought. Everyone bolted out of the castle, pushing eachothers backs to get outside. People were laughing at the tops of their lungs and Matron’s footsteps back up the stairs were lost in the chaos.

“Finally!” Blake screamed from up ahead, heel-clicking in midair.

“Which movie are we seeing?” Eddie yelled over the wave of chatter.

“It’s a surprise!” Patty called from in front.

“Yeah, so don’t go bugging people for it!” Audra said, and they both ran off to the front of the line.

“I would love something like this for my birthday.” Ben said. “Going around town for a whole day.”

“We j-j-just need t-to w-w-win a-another h-h-haunted trail.” Bill said.

“Fuck no.” Mike said. “I’d rather celebrate my birthday on a Monday than do that again.”

They all laughed and Richie smiled without even realising it at Eddie’s golden face scrunched up in laughter. His freckles looked like a constellation of stars on his olive coloured skin. Richie hoped Eddie had the best birthday of his whole life. Eddie deserved to. He’d had

an absolute shit summer with his son of a bitch mother, and if Richie could give him a happy birthday, he would.

This thought wrapped around his heart and for a second, Richie was overwhelmed by Eddie, by how much of a good person he was, by how happy he seemed, by how happy Richie wanted him to be today.

It was like someone had momentarily lit a fire in Richie's heart, one that made the rest of his body freeze up, and for a minute he felt like he'd melt.

"We have to get food!" Eddie was saying, his hands balled under his jacket. "But nothing shitty and full of sugar because I don't want to die before I'm thirty and—"

He didn't finish though, because he was suddenly barged into one of Whitemore's lights they had dotted around the garden.

He hit into the pole heavily, and let out a little a hurt noise as the wind was knocked out of him, before falling clumsily to the ground.

"Watch it, you fucking fairy." Henry Bowers said, making his way through where he'd knocked Eddie from.

"Hey!" Stan yelled. The losers had all stopped now, and Ben was helping Eddie up from the floor.

"What?" Henry said, stopping and spinning around.

"Don't you fucking call him that!" Stan yelled, cheeks burning red.

"Or what?" Henry said. He took a step forward. "You gonna whip me with your hair?"

Stan didn't say anything, he only glowered at Henry.

"Have a nice birthday, fuckface."

That was enough for Richie. He lunged foreword, seeing red. If Mike and Bev hadn't grasped him roughly around his middle, he would of gotten the shit beaten out of him.

"I you ever-" Richie said, kicking his legs in any attempt to hurt Henry.

"Leave it, Rich." Eddie said, standing in front of Richie and Henry. "He's not worth it."

Richie did, aggressively adjusting his glasses as Henry walked away.

"One day, I swear I'm going to-" He said as the losers caught up with the rest of North and East.

"And I'll happily join you." Bev said. "But I'm sure Eddie doesn't want you in the hospital on his birthday."

Richie didn't have anything to say to this, and stared angrily at his shoes as he walked.

"Hey." A soft voice said in his ear, and he looked up into the wide eyes of Eddie Kaspbrak.

"Hi." Richie croaked.

"Don't let him bother you." Eddie said, nudging his shoulder with Richie and making his heart burn again. "Small things amuse small minds."

Richie let himself laugh at this, a warm sound in the cold air.

Eddie smiled too, and walked together the rest of the way into town, bickering and laughing.

Every time their hands bumped, a small fire started in Richie's heart

Mike Hanlon, walking to town

The last of the autumn leaves crunched beneath their feet, the cool chill of winter wind being surprisingly pleasant. The clouds were slowly clearing and beams of crisp sunlight shined through in kaleidoscope patterns on the cobbled pavements.

Mike honestly couldn't think of a better day. Missing all lessons to go to town for the day, Eddie's birthday being on top of all this? What more could they ask for?

"Which is exactly why Mike should let me ride Delilah." Richie concluded.

"Your reasoning was literally 'it'd improve her back bone'." Stan shook his head.

"Which it will!" Richie defended.

"You'll end up breaking her back bone." Eddie said, and they all chuckled, steam tumbling from their mouths.

"Ok anyway," Audra said. "Does anybody know where the cinema actually is? Or have a map?"

"Yeah we went ages ago, remember that?" Eddie smiled at the memory.

"Oh yeah and we got lost in the process, which looks like what is about to happen." Stan observed.

"So you can see in the future? How's it looking' for me Stan the man?" Richie grinned and raised his eyebrows.

"Looks wise; not great."

"Nah, I think Rich will grow into his looks." Bev smirked.

"I'll believe that when I see it." Eddie huffed a laugh.

"I'm sure you will." Bev ventured, getting a thwack off Eddie.

"Hey Mike?" Buffy appeared on his left out of nowhere, making him involuntary jump.

"Buffy, hi." Mike smiled at her. She looked slightly troubled, but attempted a light and breezy smile. Mike could see straight through it. "You ok?"

“Hmm? Yeah no I’m fine, uh.” She swallowed. Mike just nodded.

“So, what flavoured popcorn are you gonna g—“

“I need your help.” She cut him off quickly

“With..?” Mike asked. Buffy sighed.

“Um, well you know how I said I’m lesbian?” Buffy said. Mike nodded and smiled fondly ever so slightly. “Well I think, I don’t know so don’t fucking hold me on this, but I think I may just have the tiniest crush on Emily.” She rambled.

Mike blinked. “You think?”

“What do you mean?”

“You mean you’re only realising this now?” Mike raised his brows. She rolled her eyes and shoved Mike playfully.

“You’re an idiot.”

“I’m kidding.” Mike chuckled. “So for how long now?”

“Too long. Which is why I need your help.” Buffy stared at her feet as the rest continued bickering over which way the cinema was.

“You gonna ask her out?” Mike grinned.

“What? No. God no, not yet. Do you know anything about crushes? Like at all?” Buffy asked defensively.

Mike thought for a moment. He had never really thought about liking or loving or crushes or anything like that. He didn’t think anyone would like him as a friend let alone significant other before he joined Whitmore. But he learnt he was wrong. About the friendship thing anyway.

He shrugged. “Never really thought about it.”

“I can tell.” Buffy said and Mike stayed quiet. She cringed and looked up at him. “Sorry, I’m just... stressed. I was asking if you’d help me

come up with a plan to find out whether she, yanno, likes me too? I don't know man."

"Well, as you can tell, I'm not exactly expert at this stuff, but I can try." Mike said and he could see the tension in Buffy's shoulders suddenly relax a little.

They talked over and over about what to do once they were in the cinema and half way through the film and five minutes before the film ended and more. Mike's brain felt fried but by the time they'd finished the plan they'd finally found the cinema and they were heading up the same golden staircase once again.

Bill Denbrough, walking in Town

They had entered the town now, all trailing in in a messy line. They were talking a bit quieter, as to not completely annoy the local people shopping, which seemed to be working as the people around looked more confused than annoyed to why seventeen school students were out in town so early in the day.

Bill looked up in front of him (the losers were all at the back of the line) to try and see where Mike had gone and caught sight of Blake and Greta instead.

It seemed like they were both dating again; their hands were held together tightly, swinging between them as they walked. Bill wondered how long it would take before they were biting each other's necks off again.

They were the only people in their line holding hands but around them, half a dozen shoppers had their hands clasped, walking close to each other.

For a second, Bill wished he had someone's hand to hold, before his mind screamed at him that he did.

His hand swooped down and reached for Bev's hand, who was walking on his right.

She looked up at him with a hint of confusion, like maybe she had

forgotten too, and then gave Bill a strained smile.

They held hands as they walked, Bill talking to Stan about his upcoming swimming tournament, but the hand which held Bev's felt... empty. He couldn't explain it in any way which made sense, but it felt wrong. Like his hand wasn't suppose to be holding Bev's hand and hers wasn't suppose to be holding his. Like their hands were both deadweights and nothing more.

But it wasn't the first time Bill had felt like this around Bev. It wasn't even at the start of the year. If he was perfectly honest with himself, he'd started to feel this way at the end of last year.

He loved Bev, of course, but he'd always loved Bev. That wasn't something that changed after they'd first kissed. And Bill felt like it should of. He felt like the nature of their relationship should of shifted completely after that. But, it didn't.

It had become even clearer after they'd come back from the summer holidays. If Bev hadn't felt it before, Bill was sure she felt it now. There was nothing between them. No love, no desire. Maybe there never was.

Bill loved Bev as Stan or Mike or Richie loved Bev. He loved her as a friend. But God, he felt terrible about it. He felt like he was letting her down. After everything she'd been through, couldnt Bill at least give her a healthy relationship?

Apparently not.

"Bill?" Bev said, looking up at him in concern. "You still in there?"

"Uh, y-y-yeah." Bill said. He raised his hand to scratch his cheek, before realising it was still held onto Bev's. He smiled bashfully and used his left and instead, feeling incredibly out of place.

"I was asking if you wanted to get food." Bev said, watching Bill closely. "For the movie?"

"Oh." Bill said. "S-s-sure. W-we could s-s-share a p-popcorn."

"How romantic." Stan said, leaning in.

Bill and Bev let out two of the most strained laughs in existence and for a second, Bill thought they'd look at each other and laugh properly and drop hands and things would go back to Before they were dating.

But nstead, Bill was still holding Bev's hand as they arrived at the cinema.

"Ah, splendid, I've been nominated for the Loser's club's third wheel." Stan said as North and East squeezed through the door. Bev let go of Bill's hand as subtly as she could and Bill felt tension seep from his shoulders.

"W-w-what do y-you mean?" Bill asked as they entered the lobby.

Stan pointed ahead and Bill caught sight of the rest of the losers; Ben and Sandie were huddled close together talking, Mike and Buffy were by the movie posters, looking around as if waiting for someone, and Richie and Eddie were in line for popcorn, Richie midway through pinching Eddie's cheek.

"Oh, r-r-right." Bill said.

But a lot of him wanted to be in Stan's position.

Mike Hanlon, in the cinema lobby with North and East

Buying snacks and drinks should've been a breeze.

Why it wasn't? Mike would never know. How they'd messed something like that up, would be beyond him forever. But it happened.

"Right then," Ben said as he stood in the growing queue for toffee popcorn. "How much do people want?"

"Three buckets." Chloe called after him.

"Three? Hell no there are seventeen of us dispshit!" Richie yelled. He joined Ben in the line, ignoring the complaints of mentally stable

members of the public. "Make that ten."

"Rich those cost like twenty pounds each." Eddie said.

"So?"

"You have like three dollars." Mike laughed.

"No it's fine." Richie reassured and they all looked around, uneasy. Still, they shrugged and Richie laid his arm on Ben's shoulder as they waited.

After a few minutes, Richie returned to the group with somehow three buckets of popcorn in his arms.

"Rich how the fuck are y—"

"Hey!" A hoarse voice growled behind Richie. He flinched and turned around.

"Hey sweetie." Richie smiled at the middle aged woman. Stan fully face palmed his head.

"You gotta pay for those." She glared.

"Why I already did!" Richie nodded to the till where Ben was standing, struggling with four buckets and wide eyes. "Look, you can see eight pounds right there."

Mike fully thought she hissed but she turned around anyway to go back. Richie waited a moment before legging it into the screen room.

"He does know that's not our one right?" Sandie asked.

Eddie groaned. "I'll go get him."

A few minutes later Ben came back and handed a few others the popcorn.

"How in hell did you get her to let it go?" Bev asked, frowning slightly.

"I gave her a tip." Ben said.

“Of how much?” Alison raised her eyebrows.

Ben sighed. “Let’s just say I won’t be buying anything from town for a while.”

Eddie and Richie returned, looking out for the receptionist in case she pounced again, and Mike walked over the vending machine to find Buffy chewing at her already cracked nails.

“Buffy, chill for a minute.” Mike said, placing a gentle hand on her shoulder that may as well have been bunched up at her ears.

“I know I know,” she looked around the group to see a few of them not so subtly looking at her. “I’ve just never seen this film before and I don’t know if it will be good or not!” She said loudly.

Mike raised his brows at her. “Little too much?”

“Lot too much.” Buffy sighed.

“You lot!” The receptionist yelled. “You may enter your screen room now!”

“Not unless you fix your attitu—“ Eddie began to yell but Stan quickly thanked her and shoved Eddie to the front. “What? I was being honest.”

They entered the room and Mike blinked rapidly to adjust his eyes. There were small side lights on the walls, enough so they could see there way down the steps without tripping and tumbling all the way to the bottom.

They found their seats and Buffy slid silently behind Emily, Mike doing the same behind Buffy. They slumped down and everybody instantly opened the popcorn and drinks they’d bought about five minutes before with great hassle.

“Uh Rich? Next time you wanna buy something, make sure you remember to pay.” Audra said.

“I thought it came with the tickets!” Richie held his hands up in defence.

Stan blinked at him from down the row. "You know sometimes I think you're just playing dumb, but then you do shit like this."

"Why that's my specialty Stanley." Richie bowed in his seat as best he could, Eddie pulling him back up and shushing him before they scared the public. Not that they hadn't done that anyway.

"Mike," Buffy hissed. "I've completely forgotten the whole plan."

"You came up with the thing, you haven't forgotten." Mike reassured quietly.

"Ok so I—"

"Hey, Buffy?" Emily tapped Buffy on the shoulder and she practically jumped out of her skin.

"Yeah?"

"Want some popcorn?" She handed her the cardboard cut out.

"Oh," Buffy relaxed slightly. "Yeah, thanks."

Emily turned back round to Chloe and Buffy shoved a handful of popcorn nervously in her mouth.

"The plan certainly wasn't shove a fistful of popcorn in your mouth." Mike chuckled, Buffy almost choking. "Right, not that you need it—"

"Need what?" She swallowed the rest of it.

"A ted talk."

"Oh."

"Well that ruined the entire vibe but, not to worry, all you need to do is breathe, be yourself, act yourself, and she'll do whatever she's comfortable with, ok?" Mike whispered, and Buffy nodded.

"Thanks Mike." She smiled genuinely, light suddenly flickering on the screen, making them all flinch.

"Woo!" Richie stood up and began to clap, five different hands

pulling him back down.

Mike sighed and smiled. The movie had begun.

Bill Denbrough, watching the movie

The movie had been running for a good half an hour now, and Bill had already raided the Losers food.

Him and Bev has ended up sharing popcorn, but he felt exactly the same as eating from their tub as he did when eating from Mike, or Ben's.

He sighed loudly, getting an annoyed look from Bev, and tried to focus back on the film.

They had all chosen a new action film that was playing, something called Plane to Hell, about a group of five friends who got off their airplane and were transported into a parallel universe or something.

It was a good film so far, but Bill wished they were watching something a little less cheesy.

"This b-b-bites the d-d-dust, huh?" He whispered into Eddie's ear.

"What?" Eddie said. He'd been leaning into Richie, and hadn't heard what Bill said.

"I s-s-said-" Bill started, forgetting to keep quiet, and multiple people shhed him.

"Be quiet." Bev hissed from his left.

"Jeez, s-s-sorry." Bill said. "S-s-someone w-woke up o-on the wr-wr-wrong side of the b-b-bed."

Even under the dim light of the screen, Bill could tell Bev was glaring at him.

He shrunk more into himself and the faded grey hoodie he'd thrown on. He just felt so restless. He'd much prefer to be sitting with Mike

or Richie and be making fun of the movie under his breath. That would actually be enjoyable.

But that's not fair. He knew Bev would happily make fun of the movie with him, giggling and raising her voice and daring the cinema employees to kick her out.

So, why isn't she? Why can't she?

Or, more likely, why can't she with Bill?

"You g-g-good?" Bill whispered to her, not thinking over his words twice.

"Splendid, now shut up." She replied.

Bill was about to sink back into his seat again and mope when something stirred in him. Aren't boyfriends meant to be there for their girlfriends? Aren't they meant to support them, to help them through thick and thin.

"Bev, y-y-you can t-talk to m-me-"

"I need the toilet." Bev said suddenly. She stood up and made her way past the other people seated, not bothering to duck under the screen.

Bill followed her on impulse. He squeezed past people's legs, whispering apologies as he slipped out of the row and hurried up the steps to the door.

It was impossibly bright when he finally does make it out. Blinking rapidly, he searches for Bev. Up ahead, a flash of ginger hair disappeared round the corner. Bill followed.

He made his way into the lobby, trying to catch up with Bev before she disappeared into the girls toilets.

"B-b-beverly!" He called, not bothering to be quiet.

She spun around, not bothering to hide her annoyance.

“What?” She snapped.

“Why are you m-m-mad at me?” Bill asked. “I kn-know you are, b-before you deny it.”

Bev huffed, seeming to consider her opinions. Finally, she said; “You act like we’re not dating and that’s everything’s fine and good and okay but as soon as I’m a little less than happy, it’s a big couple problem.”

Bill blinked, not sure what to say. Some part of him was happy that Bev was feeling the same way too, and some even deeper part of him was happy she was yelling at him, happy she wasn’t putting up a mask. But he also felt completely torn. Was it his fault their relationship hadn’t been working?

“I h-h-had a b-bad summer.” Bill stammered. “I d-didn’t-“

“Yeah, well I had a bad summer too.” Bev said.

“Th-th-this isn’t m-my fault!” Bill cried. “Y-you haven’t been e-e-exactly t-trying either!”

“Maybe if you acknowledged my existence once in a while-“

“I a-a-acknowledge your e-e-existence!” Bill shouted back. “You’re the o-o-one who d-didn’t talk to m-me unless you h-h-had do.”

“Because I didn’t know what to say!” Bev yelled.

“S-s-same here!” Bill said angrily. “You’ve c-c-changed, B-b-bev. Or m-maybe not y-y-you, but s-s-something has.”

They looked at each other. Bill saw Beverly Marsh, saw the girl who sat next to him in English and used his high lighters, saw the girl who had a water fight with him, saw the girl who got locked in the Geography classroom with him, saw the girl who thought he liked.

“I d-d-don’t think th-this is w-w-working.” Bill said finally.

“I agree.” Bev said curtly.

“You th-th-think we sh-should take a b-b-break?” Bill asked.

“I think we should fucking break up.”

It dropped down on Bill’s heart like some kind of weird anchor. He felt his breath catch with it and although he’d seen it coming a mile off, it still stung somewhere. Stung with the words of a old lullaby that got lost somewhere.

“I th-th-think so too.” He said quietly.

Bev nodded. “Okay.” She muttered.

Bill looked around the cinema lobby. A few people were huddled on the seats, looking up at Bill and Bev with concerned faces. Bill couldn’t bring himself to give a shit.

“Do y-y-you-“ Bill started, but Bev walked past him and hurried back into the cinema.

Bill watched her go, and after a while, he followed.

Richie Tozier, watching the movie

“Ollie... come on...we have to stick together!”

“This dialogue sucks ass.” Richie whispered into Eddie’s ear.

“Shut up, I like it.” Eddie hissed back.

Richie groaned but smiled to himself. Eddie really was enjoying his birthday, which was the whole reason for this. Who cares if the lines were shitty if Eddie was happy?

He leaned back in his chair and watched as Ollie was about to run past the aliens when the door to their cinema opened rather loudly.

Richie turned around, trying to figure out who left.

In the blurry light of the screen, he could just make out Bev bouncing back to her seat. Bill quickly followed, head down and he squeezed

past people.

“I think Bill and Bev had a little bathroom break together.” Richie whispered to Eddie.

“What?” Eddie said. He sat up and watched as Bill flopped back into his chair. “Ew, Richie that’s gross.” He said.

“Sure you don’t want any birthday kisses?” Richie asked. “Bev’s taken but I’m sure there’s some ladies in here-“

“Richie please!” Eddie said. A person a few seats in front glared at them and Richie and Eddie waited for them to turn around before talking again.

“You know I wouldn’t kiss a girl.” He whispered to Richie. “But nice try.”

Richie laughed lowly and stuck his hand in their shared popcorn. He felt flustered, like Eddie saying the word “kiss” gave him some sort of heat rash.

He stuffed his face with food and watched as Evelyn and Ryan talked about escaping the alien prison.

He heard shuffling besides him and then felt Eddie’s head on his shoulder, hair ticking his cheek. This wasn’t unusual- Eddie normally rested his head on Richie’s shoulder the few times they’d been to the cinema before- but Richie felt completely frozen, like Eddie’s touch had sent ice traveling around his body.

He bit the inside of his cheek and tried to focus on Ryan and Evelyn running away from the alien monsters, but he couldn’t concentrate. Eddie’s head on his shoulder was making his cheeks blush in the low light, making his heart beat a hundred miles per hour in his chest. If he could talk, he would of made some sort of joke to cover everything up, to cover up all the possibilities crashing around his head. But this was one of the rare times Richie Tozier was silent, and when he was silent, his brain was usually too loud.

It wasn’t like he hadn’t felt this way around Eddie before; there was always some fire with Eddie that burnt. But he would usually pinch

Eddie's cheeks or call him cute or make a Your Mum joke. Now it was quiet, with Eddie's head on his shoulder and the whole world seemingly paused.

"Evelyn... oh, Evelyn!"

On the giant screen, Ryan and Evelyn has just successfully outran the aliens. Richie has completely blanked out and couldn't say how or why, but they were standing on top of a mountain with dead bodies down below them, so good for them.

"Ryan, you're hurt."

"I'm fine, I promise."

Someone from their row of chairs loudly whispered "Kiss!".

Richie was as stiff as a board, and his brain was a whirlwind of colour for him to properly digest the film, dialogue or not.

"Ryan, I-" Evelyn said, but then Ryan leaned down and kissed her, his hand going to her cheek.

There was a mini cheer in the cinema and Eddie clapped lightly, his hand brushing Richie's knuckles, paper soft.

Ryan and Evelyn broke apart and then looked down at the mass of alien bodies. Some crappy love piano music was playing in the background and God, Richie just wished this whole thing was over already.

Evelyn rested her head on Ryan's shoulder, just like Eddie was doing with Richie, and they looked out over the mountains.

Holy shit, just like Eddie was doing to Richie.

And then everything snapped into place with some final click that couldn't be ignored.

Richie was in love with Eddie.

Some part of him must of known all along, must of had some clue,

but maybe he was dense or maybe he covered too much up with jokes, but it was hitting him now.

He liked Eddie.

He was in love with Eddie.

And Eddie's head was on his shoulder.

Holy shit they had held hands before.

Holy shit Eddie was his best friend.

Shit shit shit shit shit shit sh-

"Rich." Eddie whispered, moving up to face Richie from his seat. "What's up?"

"I'm fine." Richie stammered. Their faces were so close, so close that Richie could lean foreword and-

Holy shit he's thinking about kissing Eddie.

Kissing Eddie.

That whole thought made his throat close up. Him kissing Eddie. Him cupping his face and kissing Eddie. Him-

"Rich?" Eddie said again. "Are you like... you're okay?"

"Uh." Richie croaked. He swallowed and attempted a smile. "Yeah, yeah, I'm uh, good."

Eddie didn't move for a second, but then he nodded his head and moved back in his seat.

Richie leaned back too, any interest he had in the movie completely gone.

There was only one person he could think about now, and that was his best friend, Eddie Kaspbrak.

Ben Hansom, not really watching the movie but still in the cinema

Ben and Sandie has gotten so bored that the popcorn was ten times more interesting than the actual movie.

“Left a bit.” Ben whispered, and Sandie moved her head subtly. He threw a bit of popcorn and it landed straight into her mouth. She smiled brightly and silently clapped. Ben’s brain turned to tv static.

It seemed to be happening a lot lately, his head just turning to mush. Not so much work wise, that was fine and all but, when he was with East. Well specifically Sandie Millman. She had these brilliant blue eyes that put the ocean to shame - Ben often found himself literally hypnotised by them, having to mentally slap himself back to senses, and her blonde hair that shone with happiness whenever it made contact with sunlight, as if it was powered by the sun itself.

Ben honestly didn’t know what to think anymore. One part of him would say that you shouldn’t just go for a girl based on her looks, but the other part of him would say that he wasn’t, because she was smart and kind and funny and Ben just couldn’t help it. They were best friends, so wouldn’t it be kind of weird to have a crush on her? They haven’t exactly been friends for the longest of time so it wouldn’t be too weird—

“Mind out.” Sandie began to stand up, brushing off the odd corn seed off her lap. Ben looked up at her with mild concern, though his head was going three hundred miles per hour in a twenty miles per hour zone. Had he been annoying? Did she wanna move somewhere else because she didn’t wanna be seen with the chubby kid— “Toilet.”

Ben nodded to show he understood and she smiled again, her hair bouncing delicately behind her as she made her way through the row and out of the room.

Ben tried to concentrate on the film as much as he could, but all he could make out was that all the aliens where dead and everything was happy again. The boy got the girl and all was well in the world. Boy if only life was that simple. He wasn’t about to lie and say this was only the first time he felt feelings for Sandie. Ever since they

went to town weeks ago he could only see her as the beautiful angel from the east, corny as that is.

He thought for a minute and made up his mind. Screw it, Ben thought. He wasn't about to discard his feelings down a garbage disposal and let someone else get it. He'd already let that happen once and he wasn't about to let it happen again. What's the worst that could happen? She says no and flies eighty insults at him. So what? It wasn't like it hadn't happened before at his old school anyway.

He got up and pushed passed everybody. He caught Bev's eye and immediately doubt and guilt and all those other bad feelings flooded into his stomach, but he just smiled and exited the room, not letting that stop him.

Ben made his way down to the toilets just as Sandie was coming out of them, making her jump violently.

"Oh shoot sorry, i didn't mean to scare you." Great job Ben, you failed already.

"No no it's cool, couldn't stand being away from me huh?" Sandie grinned and Ben just smiled and shrugged, his heart hammering madly in his chest. "Well uh, we better get ba—"

"Sandie," Ben cut her off. "Um, can we talk?"

"Sure... is everything ok?" She frowned.

"Yeah no it's just," Ben took in a deep breath, his legs feeling not too dissimilar to jelly. Frick it. "Sandie I like you, and not only in a friend way and there is a good chance you don't like me back in that way but I just wanted to say it because if I didn't someone else you probably actually found attractive would ask you out so I thought I'd just get it out there." Ben said, panting from letting it all out in one breath.

Sandie blinked and stepped back slightly. You blew it Ben you blew it — "Ben, I—"

"I know, you don't like me, and that's fine but I've already waited too

long for somebody else and you're just really, actually beautiful and I thought well why not hey?" Ben smiled, his heart dropping down to his feet. Of course she wouldn't like him. No one ever would. "I'm sorry I shouldn't have said anyth—"

Without further notice, Sandie stepped forward, cupped Ben's face and kissed him.

Ben almost fell over.

She pulled away, beaming widely as she always did and Ben's stomach did a couple more flips.

"I like you too, Ben," Her hands dropped down to his and held them. Scrap Ben's legs feeling like jelly, they practically were jelly at this point. "Now, back to the cinema for real now?"

Ben nodded and their hands split off. Ben missed the feeling more than anything. "Yeah, to the cinema." He breathed.

They wandered back into the screen room and—

Holy shit. Ben Hanscom had just been kissed.

Mike Hanlon, leaving the cinema

"And then and then she like, leaned back, like onto me! Like back ONTO me!" Buffy said as enthusiastically as she could in a quiet voice as they exited down the stairs of the cinema.

"Look at you, all smitten." Mike pokes her and she playfully rolled her eyes.

"You know, I haven't told anyone about... this." Buffy said more seriously. "My sexuality, I mean."

"Well, just know you can if you want. No one will judge." Mike reassured and Buffy smiled.

"And what about you Mr Hanlon." She wiggled her eyebrows. "Have

you got your eye on anyone?”

Mike snorted. “Only my sheep.”

“Oh come on, that’s boring.” Buffy chuckled as they stopped at the door.

“G-g-guys,” Bill pushed repeatedly on the door handle. “I th-th-think its l-locked.”

Richie moved Bill out the way and tried for himself, repeating the motion. “Holy shit, he’s right.”

Chloe pushed past them both and pulled the door open easily. “That’s because it’s a pull, dummies.”

“T-totally knew that.” Bill muttered as they filtered out of the fire exit doors.

Cool breeze hit them like a truck, fighting past their clothes and cooling down their skin as if they were in a freezer.

“I swear it wasn’t this cold when we left.” Eddie hugged himself tightly as they walked back across the town. Street lights shimmered on through the frosty glass as the sun began its setting routine once again.

Browning, almost leafless trees were swaying gently in the wind, as if waving goodbye. Even the trees seemed to be paired up, having their own significant other. Mike frowned ever so slightly. Maybe he had ought to think about liking and loving and all the complicated stuff that he knew was inevitable. Bill and Bev had made it look pretty easy but then again, after Bev slumping angrily next to him, Bill following suit, Mike didn’t think their relationship would be such a good example.

But was there a good example anyway? Because always in magazines there would be a whole two pages on a celebrity’s love love and how it’s going amazing with their two children, but Mike really doubted every time he read one it were all true. Something was hidden behind the curtain of happiness.

If Mike were to go into a relationship, he wouldn't want to set himself up for heart break. He'd rather wait until he finds someone he genuinely loves and who genuinely loves him and see where things go from there.

Mike smiled and looked up to see Emily and Buffy laughing and chatting to the gods, both of them looking genuinely happy.

Love's great and all, he thought, but for now he has his sheep.

Richie Tozier, walking back to Whitmore

All of the Losers (apart from Mike, who was walking further in front with Buffy) were walking back through the town, in a line.

Bill and Bev were at the other ends, completely in their own worlds. Ben and Eddie were talking about something or another, something that was passing through Richie's head, Stan nodding along.

Ever since the cinema, Richie hadn't been paying much attention to anything. All he could really focus on was Eddie, and how beautiful Eddie looked, and how stupid he was for not realising he liked Eddie earlier.

His hand felt like it was burning, burning to hold Eddie's hand, and every time he imagined them doing so, his face would burn bright red.

He liked Eddie Kaspbrak.

That kept spinning around his head. Eddie Kaspbrak, who spoke so fast you could barely make out what he was saying. Eddie Kaspbrak, who always wore short shorts and fanny packs. Eddie Kaspbrak, who was Richie's best friend.

That Eddie.

So yeah, Richie was fucked.

It hadn't really thought of it before because. Eddie. Eddie Kaspbrak. This was Eddie Kaspbrak. But Richie supposed he always knew deep

down. Supposed that was the real reason he teased Eddie so much.

Still, watching Eddie talk so animatedly now was making his heart do flips like never before. Richie actually felt like he was riding some weird sort of rollercoaster, with sharp jolts and spins.

And then there was the fact that Eddie didn't like him back. Or probably didn't. Or maybe...

No. No way could Eddie like Richie back. Eddie was the one who always told Richie to shut up, always reminded Richie how gross he was.

But Eddie was also the one who held Richie's hand, who made sure he was okay, who talked to Richie even if Richie was being annoying.

It was all a technicolor blur in Richie's mind. The air which had seemed so bitter on the walk to town was now simple nothing. Richie was numb to it, as his ears were numb to whatever conversation Ben and Eddie were having.

But he felt sure if he didn't tell anyone soon, he'd burst.

Taking a deep breath and trying to not scream in confusion, Richie scanned his friends.

His first pick would probably of been Bill, considering Bill already knew he was bi. But Bill looked completely out of it. So Richie made a quick decision and chose the person he thought would be best in this situation.

"Stan." He said. His voice sounded horse, maybe from the cold, maybe from the abnormal amount of time he had been quiet (which was actually not that long, but to Richie it seemed like forever).

"Yeah?" Stan said, turning from Ben to look at Richie.

"Can we talk." Richie said. It came out as more of a statement than a question, and Stan raised one of his eyebrows.

"Can we?" Richie said. He felt like his head would explode if he didn't tell someone soon.

"If it's that serious then-" Stan started to half joke, but Richie grabbed his arm and dragged him behind a little, hoping the Losers wouldn't notice.

"Okay, Mr Mystery." Stan said. "What the hell is up with you?"

"I think I like Eddie." Richie said in one breath. It felt like something massive rolling out of his mouth, something heavy and big that he'd kept inside him for way too long.

"Oh." Stan said. He didn't look too shocked or surprised.

"Yeah." Richie said. "Pretty um... pretty big deal."

Stan nodded and didn't say anything. Richie began to worry, suddenly, about things he hadn't worried about before. What if Stan, for some insane reason, didn't accept him or something fucking stupid like that? He accepted Eddie but... shit what if Stan-

"Stanny?" Richie said. "Say something before I go completely crazy."

Stan looked at Richie with maybe some dry amusement. "I'm just surprised it took you this long."

Richie didn't think anything else could make his head cloud over, but still, something about what Stan had said made him do a double take all the same.

"You knew?" He asked weakly.

"Well, yeah." Stan said. His expression dropped slightly, so he looked gentler. "I kind of always thought that you liked him more than a friend."

Richie swallowed (his throat was suddenly completely dry) and nodded, stuffing his hands into his jacket. "Honestly, I don't know how I didn't realise it before. I mean, now all I can think about is Eddie and..."

Richie trailed off and sighed, letting a thin cloud of steam leave his mouth. It was all too much, all his feelings, all his confusion.

"I'm not much of a romantic." Stan said. "But maybe you should ask him out?"

"No!" Richie said, as if Stan had electrocuted him. "No way, not a chance!"

"Why?" Stan said, clearly confused.

"Because Eddie doesn't like me back!" Richie said.

"He... doesn't?" Stan said, sounding as confused as Richie felt.

"Well, I mean, he probably doesn't." Richie said. "Like, why would he?"

"Rich." Stan said, stopping in his tracks. "You're annoying, yes, and loud, yes, but you're definitely not unlovable."

Richie stopped too and pursed his lips. "But—"

"No buts, Richie. You're a fucking loser and thank god for that. I don't know what any of us would do without you. I mean, the losers club without Richie Tozier? Ugh, don't make me imagine it."

Richie managed to laugh through the crack in his pink tinted lips. "Thanks, Stan." He said lowly.

"Yeah, don't go all sappy on me." Stan said, but his smile was kind.

And in the midst of all the colour and confusion and hurt, Richie managed to find some reassurance in Stan's words.

"I still can't believe how fucking oblivious you are, though."

Ben Hansom, in Whitmore's grounds

Ben had forgotten how beautiful Whitmore looked in the evening. The orange hue of final strays of sunlight were casted gently onto Whitmore's side. The kaleidoscope patterns off the swimming pool danced in a confident blue- if that's even a thing.

Even from the distance you could see the majority of the lights turned on in every window. It was strange, he thought, how he could almost call it home again.

They waded through the front gates, the little lantern poles that stood either side of the path flickered harmlessly as they casted enough light for the seventeen to see by.

But let's address the oversized elephant in the room. Ben Hanscom was just barely moving from complete mess to only just remembering his name. It probably shouldn't even have been that big of a deal. It was only one kiss.

But that one kiss was one more than he's ever had in his life. But now, he didn't know what to do with himself. Ben knew they'd need to have a talk. About them. Whether they were still a plural 'them' or changed to singular. But Ben couldn't bring himself.

Slight guilt still gnawed at his stomach whenever he saw Bev. Not as in just seeing her walking around or catching sight of her red hair, but really seeing her. She looked sad, distraught even. As if she'd just lost somebody close to her. Ben could only guess what had happened but that didn't stop him from wanting to run up to her and hug her, to tell her everything would be ok.

But Ben missed his chance with all that, a long while ago. He had to focus on the here and now. The here and now who was standing next to him as they walked, their hands brushing every so often.

As they were about to walk inside, Ben pulled Sandie round the corner of the building.

"Woah," she frowned. "you alright?"

"Um I'm fine," Ben was slightly, only slightly, taken back by how the light made her look breathtakingly beautiful. "But we need to talk."

"Last time this happened we shared a kiss." She smirked, and Ben's knees almost buckled.

"Yeah well, that's what I was going to talk about." Ben said.

Her smile faded. "Did I do something wrong or...?"

"No no, not at all. It's just, what now?" Ben asked, looking at her pale blue eyes which shone in the last light. "I mean, we kissed, but does that even mean anything to you? I mean for me I thought I'd ascended into heaven, but it could've been different for you."

"Ok, do you wanna know a secret?" Sandie said, looking out to the horizon as the sun completely set. Ben shrugged. "That was my first kiss."

"Guess that's another thing in common." Ben chuckled and looked down out his feet. "But that still wasn't really an answer."

"Yes, Ben, it was important to me." Sandie smiled.

Ben nodded. "Well. Now what?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you want anything to happen? Like you know, with us? I mean I totally understand if you don't but like, I don't know, maybe I got the wrong impression from the kiss but did you wanna like maybe..." Ben rambled, physically cringing at himself for sounding like such a dork.

"Are you trying to ask me out, Hanscom?" Sandie grinned.

"That depends on your answer." Ben laughed lightly, not having a clue about what to do with his hands.

"Well," Sandie (thankfully) took his hands and held them, and Ben's heart felt like it was going to hammer out of his chest. She leaned in close to his ear and whispered. "I would love to be your girlfriend."

Ben let go of her hands and started walking down the field.

"Uh, Ben?" She called after him, confusion echoing around the walls. "What are you—"

"I don't know." He called back and just kept walking. And he wasn't lying. He was extremely delusional at that moment in time.

And then he started running, hearing Sandie following close behind.

“Ben what are you—“

And with out hesitation, he jumped, screamed, “Sandie Millman is my GIRLFRIEND!” And canon balled into the pool which was a lot colder than he anticipated. He surfaced to find Sandie laughing and Ben couldn’t help but laugh back, barely feeling the hyperthermia in his body. He struggled out of the pool and barely started shivering.

“Wow, I can’t believe I’m dating a dumbass.” Sandie laced their fingers together as they walked back to the castle.

“And I cant believe I’m dating Sandie Millman.” Ben said and shook his head, sea water flying everywhere.

“Hey!” Sandie cried and stepped back, laughing hysterically.

“I’ve got a lot more of where that came from.” Ben grinned and began chasing Sandie around to the door, both of them almost crying with laughter.

Ben was thankful for the warmth immediately as they pushed open the door and began to climb the stairs, hand in hand.

“Today certainly was interesting huh.” Sandie sighed.

“Indeed it was.” Ben grinned at her. In that moment he wanted to kiss her again, and why he didn’t was still a tad annoying to Ben, but it wasn’t the right time.

They said their goodbyes and Ben made his way back to his dorm, longing for a hot bath and—

Holy shit. Ben Hanscom had a girlfriend.

Bill Denbrough, going to his dormitory

They had said goodbye to East at the staircase and headed up to their dormitory.

Everyone was talking loudly, colour spilling from their faces and eyes and mouths, light glistening from within them. The day had blushed their cheeks red and they were all talking about how much they enjoyed it, how fun it had been, how cheesy the movie was, how nice of a birthday it must have been.

All Bill could do was look down at his feet and will himself not to ruin Eddie's day by complaining or moping.

Him and Bev weren't meant to work out. He knew that. Breaking up was the best thing for them to do. He also knew that. But the thought of Bev hating him was one that sent a rock down his throat.

Beverly Marsh was the first friend he'd made at Whitemore, in many ways. And for the longest time, before they'd started to Date and things had tumbled downhill, they'd been close friends. They'd write stupid love notes and pin them to teachers desks, they'd steal more food from the canteen on impulse, they'd draw designs on the wall whenever they sat together in lessons.

He loved all the Losers, and was friends with all the losers, but all of them were so equally different. He wasn't going to find a Bev in Stan or Mike or Eddie, just like he wouldn't find any of them in her.

And he missed her so much. He missed her as a friend and he couldn't stand the thought of her never talking to him again.

"Bill, you okay?" Eddie asked from his side. His brown hair was a mess from the wind and his long lived smile was slowly fading.

Because of him. Because Bill had to make Eddie worry on his Birthday.

"Y-y-yeah." Bill said. He trudged into their dormitory, the heat from their radiator hitting him like a tilde wave. "J-j-just t-t-tired."

Eddie looked like he didn't believe him, and if he put two and two together, he could easily figure out what was wrong. But Eddie also saw the look in Bill's eyes that just asked for some space, and Eddie nodded and went over to his bed.

"Ready for your presents, Eds?" Richie said. He voice burnt with

character and Bill could practically feel the energy coming off him.

“Don’t call me Eds.” Eddie said, walking over to Richie. Richie laughed, but it sounded sudden, and Bill thought suddenly that he wasn’t the only one hiding things.

“East must of forgot to bring your their presents.” Eric said, joining the boys by Richie’s bed.

“Just get them tomorrow.” Stan said.

“I could go now.” Ben piped up. “And ask-“

His hair was dripping with water, apparently from falling into the pool on the way back. Maybe if Bill has more than an ounce of life left in him, he would of cared to question the fact the pool was a good five minute walk away from their general direction.

“I think someone wants to-“ Richie began, eyes glowing behind his glasses.

“Shut up, Richie!” Ben hissed urgently, water droplets spraying from his dampened hair.

No, Bill thought, he definitely wasn’t the only one hiding things.

“I’ll get them in the morning.” Eddie dismissed it. “But I’ll open yours now.”

The next fifteen minutes were full of so much happiness, so much laughter, that Bill felt like he was watching from behind a window.

He numbly wondered if Bev felt the same too.

13. Act Three, Scene Six; You can never wrap up warm enough in this weather

Bill Denbrough, in the canteen
Fuck it. He'd had enough.

He had one mission now, and he didn't care if that mission was hard or stupid. He was going to talk to Beverly Marsh.

It had been a solid week or so since their fight in the cinema lobby, and ever since it had been cold looks and awkward air between them. And it was effecting the Losers Club, Bill knew it was.

And the simple fact was, he didn't hate Bev. He didn't hate her at all. He hated dating her, as he's sure she hated dating him. But he doesn't-

He screamed lowly into his bowl of cheerios, not realising he was going to.

"Uh, Bill?" Mike asked from further up the table. "Are you okay?"

"MmmugaAHH." Bill half screamed half groaned. "I'm f-fine."

The rest of the losers started at him for a few seconds, seemed to figure it was just Bill Denbrough, and continued their chatter.

On a slightly happier note, it was the winter half term, which meant no lessons for a week. Everyone was in their own clothes, eating happily and talking off the upcoming day.

Which was the winter sports event.

It was all Stan, Eddie and Mike could talk about. Tournaments started at ten and ended at five, and all events were competitive.

East and North's lacrosse team was set to play against West and South at one, which meant Mike was leaving for the pitch an hour early to practice. Stan was swimming around lunch time too, and if he was in the top three, he'd be entered into the semifinals for the

national swimming championship for next year. And Eddie was competing in the cycling race which was just after the lacrosse match.

It was high energy and Bill felt pleased for them but he also felt kind of like useless weight in comparison.

His friends were all doing amazing things, working towards something, working hard for something they love, and all Bill was doing was messing shit up. Per usual.

But fuck it, enough was enough. He was doing this for Beverly Marsh and Bill Denbrough and so what if they dated for a few months? It was... it was a mistake! Just a mistake. And Bill was sure Bev wouldn't rip his face off, right?, because they had fun too like that time they ran away from West and South with water guns and that other time when they... well, when they had sleepovers and stuff, but only before they dated, after they dated everything was a bit stiff and awkward, but it was the before that mattered the before which Bill needed to salvage, the before which Bill had to... talk to Bev....

"Bill?" Richie said. He was standing up, holding his empty breakfast tray. The rest of the table was empty. "You coming?"

"Hum?" Bill said. "Oh, y-y-yeah."

He dumped his tray with Richie, hoping Bev hadn't gone off somewhere like East's Dormitory or the Pacific sea or somewhere else where he couldn't find her.

They caught up with the Losers and Bill grabbed Bev's arm as the losers drifted up the stairs, pulling her aside.

"You not coming?" Eddie asked, stopping mid way on the stairs.

"G-give us a s-s-second." Bill said.

"If you're sure..." Ben said. He was bouncing his feet slightly and Bill guessed why; Sandie. Ever since they'd started dating, something Ben had confessed to the Losers while blushing the whole time, he would find her whenever, just to hold her hand or tell her how beautiful she was or just to see her. And despite being absolutely fed up with

romance, Bill was happy for Ben. And he thought Ben was happier too. So really, it was a win win.

“See you guys.” Stan said, and the five went up the stairs, Mike muttering Lacrosse techniques under his breath and Eddie lifting his legs twice as high as he jumped up the stairs.

Bill sighed and looked at Bev. Her hair was in a ponytail, but parts were already spilling out due to how short her hair was.

“What is it?” She asked, crossing her arms.

“L-l-look, B-b-b-b-bev.” Bill said, not really sure how to approach this. “I-i’m s-sorry about e-e-everything. I d-don’t h-h-hate you, or th-th-think you’re w-w-wrong. I just-“

“Snapped.” Bev said. “Yeah, sure, I get it.”

She moved to walk off but Bill took her shoulder gently and smiled. “I was a sh-sh-shit boyfriend, B-b-bev, but I h-h-hope I c-can still b-be your f-f-friend.”

“Okay Bill, going in with a deep speech.” Bev said, and she smiled this time.

“Is t-t-that a y-yes?” Bill asked.

Bev smiled despite herself and looked at Bill, hair bopping. “Bill, I like you too. But we obviously weren’t made for each other in that way, and I’m sorry about that.”

Bill shook his head, “It’s n-not your f-f-fault, Bev.”

“Maybe not, but I should of done something.” Bev said. “You were right, it wasn’t just me who had a tough summer.”

Bill smiled and felt some tension that had been building up in shoulders leave, seeping out of his body like a long-held breath.

Bev didn’t hate him. Even if he fucked shit up, she didn’t hate him.

“I’m s-s-sorry too.” Bill said. “I d-d-didn’t w-want to s-s-say something

in-incase-“

“In case you didn’t feel the same way.” Bev finished, nodding her head. “Yeah I get it.”

“So... f-f-friends?” Bill said.

“God, please.” Bev said. She poked his chest. “You were a terrible kisser.”

“Wow, th-th-thanks.” Bill said, grinning.

Bev laughed and they linked arms, walking up the stairs together.

Beverly Marsh, in the drama hall

“Now we move left, then right, then left again but quickly-“

“Bev.” Chloe said, a pained expression on her face as she tried to keep up with what Bev was instructing. “Our lacrosse game is in two hours tops.”

“That’s enough time to run through at least one dance.” Bev said.

“We need to practice.” Alison said awkwardly. “It’s been a while since we last played and-“

“And you have to work as one on the field.” Mike said from further back.

“This is important!” Bev said, sure they’d been fine on the pitch. They could already finish each other’s sentences, for christ sake!

“We have a good three months before open night, we’ll be fine.” Chloe said.

Bev flopped the arm holding the sheet music down, looking at the stage as one would look at room of partially stupid seven year olds. They had ages before the sports tournament even began, and they had a good ten songs they had to polish, choreography and all. And

Beverly needed to speak, she need to direct, she needed to have some control over something before she completely lost her mind.

“I th-th-think Bev h-has a p-point.” Bill said. She looked towards him, hopeful that finally someone had some common sense, but all he did was tip her a wink and smile. As if now everyone’s doubts will be gone because Bill said six measly words.

But he was trying, trying in a way she wasn’t, so she gave him a strained smile and waited to get attacked by everyone again.

“Why do you care so much anyway?” Greta said, arms on her hips. “I mean, you haven’t cared before.”

“I’m half director!” Bev said, tempted to pull Greta’s hair out. “Of course I care!”

“Not much.” Greta said, like her word was the final defying factor.

Bev huffed much angrier than she’d intended to and looked at the sheet for “Summer Nights”. Fuck it, her trying to do something good was stupid anyway. What good was her input? Jump then spin then jump? Chloe and Greta were the dancers, not her. And it wasn’t as if she could control anything anyway.

Or direct. Or whatever.

“Whatever.”

She wet her lip with her tongue, hating the dropping feeling in her stomach that accompanied defeat. Fucking bullshit.

“It’s bullshit anyway, we’ll do it after half term.”

Someone went “Woo!” in a way too happy voice and everyone started talking in low rumbles, climbing off the stage.

“I s-s-still think B-b-bev was a v-v-very good d-d-director.” Bill said loudly as everyone departed. “In f-f-fact-“

“Thank you, Bill.” Bev said curtly, before Bill got everyone to cheer for her or something.

She went to the binder placed carefully on the chair, neatly lined, and opened it, making a big thing of clipping the music back into the right section.

“Bev?” A soft voice asked, a voice that belonged to Eddie Kaspbrak.

“Yeahhh?” Bev almost bellowed, trying to sound unbothered.

“Do you er... do you want to take a walk?”

Bev couldn't take any longer to clip a sheet of A4 paper so she closed the book slowly. “I'm good.” She said loudly.

“Are you sure?” Eddie said, hovering on one leg. “We could go through the so-“

“No, I'm good.” Bev said said, still half yelling.

“Bev, you are not good.” Eddie said, and he sounded two seconds away from losing his shit. Which... Bev knows how he felt.

“Eddie.” She said plainly, turning to face him. “I need some space, okay?”

Eddie scanned her face and shook his head. “No. No, you need to talk to someone.”

“No I don't.”

“Yes you do.” He linked his arm with hers and matched her out of the hall.

“Eddie-“ Bev said, feeling like a fish out of water.

“Bev, please.” Eddie said, taking her through the exit doors so they were outside. “Talk to me. What's got you so down?”

“Woah, whoever said I was down?” Bev said, breaking her arm away.

“I'm not blind.” Eddie said. “One second you skive sewing class then you and Bill vanish from the cinema then you're becoming a dance instructor.”

“It’s called versatility.” Bev said, holding up her arm in a weird shield stance to shove the door open by. “I have more than one emoticon. And, I’m the fucking director! Of course I’m going to-“

“No offence Bev, but the only loser who could choreograph a dance is Mike.” Eddie said. They were by the small mounds behind the school, the trees all a rusty orange colour as November wore on. Bev felt the cold dance up her core, and she sunk into her jacket more, the thin material not doing much to help.

“Thanks for that.” She said, wiggling her shoulders to try and get her jacket further on.

“You know I’m right, Bev.” Eddie said. And okay, maybe he was. But so what if she wanted to choreograph a dance? It’s not like she’s fucking sabotaging the play or something.

They walk in silence for a minute or so, letting the wind and waves speak, before Eddie says something again;

“I want you to be able to tell me.” He said. “Whatever it is you need to tell me.”

“I don’t need to tell you anything.” Bev said, still stubborn to keep quiet.

“Okay, not need.” Eddie said, tilting his head. “But whatever happens... I want you to be able to talk to me about it. You’re my best friend, Bev.”

She sighed. She stopped. She looked at Eddie and she took in everything about him, about them. And she decided that she’s being fucking stupid.

“Me and Bill-“ She said, brushing her hair out of her face. “We broke up.”

“Oh.” Eddie said, offering all the support they’d come out in the freezing cold for.

“Yep.” Bev said. “It was pretty dramatic in the end.”

“He doesn’t deserve you anyway.” Eddie said. “I mean, I love Bill, but you two? Never made to work out.”

Bev laughed and found some warmth in it. “Okay professor love.”

Eddie scrunched up his nose; “Ew.”

“It wasn’t like.” She rubbed her cheek. “It wasn’t working. We weren’t working. As a couple. But before we started dating, everything was good.”

“Then why did you start?” Eddie asked.

Bev shrugged. “We were locked in a Geography classroom together. He was the first boy who, before I met all you, didn’t treat me like crap. I was probably the first girl he’d said more than one word to. It was more lust than love.”

“If it’s over, and you’re both still friends, then why are you so out of it?” Eddie asked.

And there was the simple answer that it was before she had lost control over everything. All factors of her life were spinning and spiralling and there was nothing she could do but stand and watch. And Bill wasn’t even a bad person. It just... didn’t work.

And how much of that was on her?

“Enough of me.” She said curtly. She looked at Eddie and smiled gently. “What about you, hey? How’s your crush goin’?”

Eddie blushed undoubtedly and looks at his feet. “It’s not.” He said. “I don’t even think I have one.”

Wait, what?

“What?” Bev said. “You said you did.”

“Yeah.” Eddie said. “But I just didn’t want you to feel so alone. I wanted to talk to you again and-“

“Wait do you don’t like R- anyone.” Bev said, breaking apart to look

at Eddie.

“Uh...” Eddie rubbed his nose. “No.”

Bev looked at him. “Oh.”

“Oh.” Eddie said. “It’s just... I saw you and Bill and I saw how alone you felt and, I don’t know, I wanted you to feel like you had someone to talk to.”

Bev laughed through her nose and shook her head. “You’re an idiot, Eddie.” She said. “You don’t need to lie to talk to me, you know.”

“I know.” Eddie said. “But I just... I wanted us to be like us again. Like Eddie and Bev, like when we talked about things.”

“We still talk about things, Moron.” She said. “And you seriously don’t like anyone?”

“Seriously.” Eddie said.

“Dang.” Bev said. “Just when I thought I figured out who it was.”

“What?” Eddie said.

“Nothing.” Bev laughed, and Eddie was much more naive than she thought.

But she loved him and he clearly loved her.

And to be loved gently and kindly. Well, that was something Beverly Marsh needed.

Stan Uris, in the boys changing rooms

“Fuck, you actually forget how important breathing is huh.” Stan said, taking in shaky deep breaths, though none of them satisfying his need of oxygen.

“C-c-can come it h-handy every so o-o-often.” Bill nodded, watching as Stan struggled to tuck his continuously growing hair into the swim

cap.

Stan groaned and whipped it off, readjusting his hair into a messy bun and trying again.

Bill reached up to help. “W-w-want some h-h-he-help with th—“

“Don’t touch my fucking hair.” Stan swatted his hands away and Bill held them up in defence. With great haste, Stan finally got all the strands he could get into the cap and began to stretch wildly.

“Did y-y-you kn-know,” Bill’s eyes followed Stan as he swung his arm over his head and bent sideways. “That the m-m-m-muh-m-more hair you have,” Stan jumped around a few times. “The h-heavier your head g-g-g-gets and,” Stan dropped to the floor and planked, wondering to himself how cold the water would be. “That increases th-th-the chance of b-b-br-breaking your neck?”

Stan got up and dusted down his swim shorts, staring at Bill in mild confusion. He pressed the back of his hand to Bill’s forehead. Bill’s eyes crossed as he looked up at it. “Do you have a fever?”

“I-I-I’m serious!” Bill said as Stan took his hand away and got his goggles, adjusting them on his head and testing them out.

“Yeah?” Stan scrunched his face around a couple of times. “And who told you that?”

“W-well nobody v-v-v-verbally b-but this magazine th-thingy said it s-s-so I thought I’d l-let you know.” Bill said.

“And this magazine was called..?” Stan did the front crawl motion in the air and jumped some more.

“Uhhhh s-s-something like r-r-record book? To b-b-be honest I thought it w-w-was gonna be about like t-t-t-turn tables and sh-shit.” Bill shrugged and followed Stan out of the changing rooms.

Stan quickly turned around, almost making Bill walk into him. He placed his hand on his forehead once again, nodded, and said, “Oh yeah, definite fever.”

The walked quickly down to the pool which was now somewhat surrounded by parents and teachers, plus the odd school kids- mainly the rest of the losers.

Stan wouldn't say he was too nervous. As in of course his was flooded with adrenaline and half of that adrenaline being nerves but he wasn't about to pull out of the race. He just felt that his breath was randomly not coming to him. It obviously was otherwise he'd probably be dead in a matter of a minute but for some reason his head just felt stuffy. But he was fine. He was going to go into that race as if it was practice and do what he always does.

And he plans on winning it.

He just kind of felt an off vibe about today. Like something was gonna happen but he couldn't quite tell what. But it was probably nothing so he just had to get his head in the game and he'd be on his way.

"H-h-hey, are y-you ok?" Bill frowned as they stopped beside the pool.

"Hmm? What? Yeah no I'm good- great even." Stan nodded. He dipped his toe into the water. It was colder than he'd thought.

"Are y-y-you sur—"

"Bill I'm fine." Stan put a hand on his shoulder and Bill nodded doubtfully.

"W-w-well if y-you need us, we'll b-b-b-buh-be sitting there." Bill pointed to the rest of the losers and Stan smiled absentmindedly. He's got this.

Suddenly Mr Valley pulled out this big old megaphone and yelled, "Contenders, at your starting positions!" Stan heard a chorus of good lucks as he jogged to his lane. It was a mere hundred meters race, one he'd done plenty of times before.

"You got this Stan the man!" Richie screamed before being tugged down by Eddie. Stan smiled again.

“On your marks...” Mr Valley started. Stan drummed his fingers on the block.

“Get set...” Stan desperately tried to ignore the single strand of hair that hung loosely on his cheek. Silence engulfed the field.

A short, loud gun shot fired and the six contestants dived into the pool. They raced along, Stan completing the first twenty five meters in a short thirty seconds. Doing a tumble turn beneath the water, he rapidly sped back the way he came. ‘So far so good’, he thought to himself.

He’d completed seventy five meters and kicked back for his last lap. ‘Keep going keep going,’ he thought. ‘Crawl crawl crawl breathe crawl crawl-‘ he repeated over and over like a mantra. He was almost there! Almost at the finish line, and better yet a close up second.

‘Crawl crawl crawl breathe—‘

‘Breathe!’

‘This is the part where you breathe, Stan. That thing where you take in oxygen to your lungs?!’ Stan struggled as too many bubbles tumbled from his mouth. ‘Fuck shit fuck SHIT AIR I NEED-‘ Stan kicked and slapped the water until he reached the surface and heaved every breath he took, nothing working. He felt himself hyperventilate madly until he was lightheaded. He turned around to see the other four contestants still a way behind him. He coughed and choked, grasping at any oxygen he could. Why couldn’t he breathe? What was happening?

His mind whirled as he saw six blurry figures rush to the side of the pool. It was the losers club.

“Stan,” Mike said and Stan choked some more. “Hey hey, it’s alright, it’s ok.” Stan’s shoulders began to relax slightly.

“Just breathe, focus on something.” Eddie said calmly, and Stan felt his first breath that actually hit his lungs.

“Thanks guys.” Stan croaked, turning around to see the others much, much closer now.

“If you need to pull out, do so.” Bev nodded, and smiled.

Stan shook his head. “I may not see first place but I definitely am not going to see third place.” He sighed again. ‘You’re fine, see? You’re fine’.

“Role up role up! Stanalan is back up and running! Do us proud old champ!” Richie yelled in his British accent and Stan took off again, just as he swapped to third place. He powered through the water like some sort of speed boat and flew past into second easily, touching the edge of the pool and dragging himself up out of the water.

“And we have our first, second and third! Well done racers!” Mr Valley said before coming over to Stan and talking to him without the megaphone. “Are you alright.”

Stan cleared his throat and nodded, begging for a towel and begging to see his friends. He ran off and Ben practically hugged the towel around Stan immediately.

“Stan, a-a-are you ok?” Bill looked at him in concern, deep concern.

“Just a tad frustrated I didn’t come first.” Stan replied honestly.

“Ah but you know what they say,” Bev grinned. “First is the worst and second is the best!”

“Not quite how it works but—“

“Oh but you know, the fact you almost had a panic attack under water was just a mere annoyance?” Eddie pushed past them all and hugged him tightly.

“Woah woah, I’m ok! Serious!” Stan couldn’t help but grin.

Mike laid a gentle arm over his shoulder. “Good.”

“Look Stanny! I think your medal is arriving.” Richie waltzed forward, placed it grandly over Stan’s head and bowed down. “All hail!”

“Shut up dipshit.” Stan rolled his eyes playfully and they all laughed.

See? Everything was fine. Nothing bad is going to happen.

Richie Tozier, beside the lacrosse pitch

Richie had been given plenty of hard tasks before in his life time, but this one was definitely the hardest.

First of all, telling a close friend he had a crush on this other guy and then telling him they knew the entire time is one thing, but this 'other guy' being Eddie Kaspbrak and trying not to lose his shit more than he already has is a whole new ball game.

"What the fuck was in his breakfast?" Bev laughed lightly as Richie twitched around and fiddled with his fingers all at eight hundred miles per hour. They were waiting around at the edge of the lacrosse pitch, counting down the minutes until Mike and the rest of the team took off into the game.

"He did have three servings of porridge." Ben reasoned.

Eddie mimicked gagging. "Eugh." He shuddered. "How do you even eat that stuff?"

It wasn't really a question. It wasn't exactly asking for an answer, but Richie's goddamned big mouth gave one anyway.

"Funny, your mom told me—"

"Beep beep for the fifth time today Rich." Eddie groaned. "Jeez you must be feeling like being particularly annoying today."

"Jeez Rich! You must be feeling par-tic-ularly annoying today!' Pfft! Eds you crack me up." Richie imitated, causing Eddie to roll his eyes and drop the conversation. Richie continued to chuckle lightly and realised there were finger nail prints in his palm. Oh.

"Richie," Stan hissed in Richie's ear, water droplets from the very tips of his hair that didn't make it into the cap dropping onto his shoulders.

“Staniel!” Richie patted him on the back but Stan through his arm off. “Um, are you ok—“

Stan grabbed his ARM and tugged him out of parents’ earshot.

“Stanley if you want a kiss just tell me—“

“Shut the fuck up.” Stan snapped. Richie involuntarily stepped back slightly. Had he done something wrong? Richie thought back to things he did through the past months and, oh shit he had a lot of apologies to make, but nothing massive. “I thought you said you liked Eddie?”

Richie’s smile dropped. “What’s that got to do with anything?”

“You’re literally being the most annoying little shit ever- more than usual.” Stan said honestly.

“I’ll take that as uno complemento.” Richie smirked lazily.

“Richie I’m serious, and that’s not compliment in Spanish by the way.” Stan said and Richie chewed the inside of his cheek.

“But they’re all jokes. He knows that.” Richie said.

“Yes, he does, but there’s a fine line between them being funny and just plain annoying.” Stan said more calmly. Richie sighed, looking back to the losers to see Eddie laughing with Bev hysterically while Bill did something stupid.

Richie knew that cracking jokes and pulling out inaccurate voices was his coping mechanism. Always has, and probably always will be. It’s not something he could just stop, especially when he was trying to deal with something as beautiful and Eddie, cringe as that sounds.

Eddie turned and locked eyes with Richie, smiled gently and turned back to the group. Richie almost buckled.

“I’m not asking you to change, not at all, but collectively we have beeped you five times today,” Stan couldn’t help but almost laugh at that sentence, and Richie felt a smile return to his face. “So just, yanno, tone it down a bit.”

“Thanks Stan the Man, your wiseness will forever outwit mine.” Richie bowed down and Stan rolled his eyes playfully. A piercing whistle was blown, signifying the game had begun. “Now come along, we can’t miss your boyfriends lacrosse game!”

“My WHAT?!” Stan screeched, chasing after Richie back to the losers.

“Nothing! Nothing! I didn’t— I spoke? I don’t recall speaking!” Richie panted and laughed at the same time, making a harsh wheezing sound. He flung himself behind Eddie and used him as a body guard.

“Rich what are you—“

“He’s chasing me and my powers are weakened, I need your help.” Richie said, mimicking this game he once played at the arcade that was near his old school.

Eddie giggled and Richie smiled even wider.

“Jokes on you, I’ve been on Stan’s team the entire time.” Eddie raised his eyebrows and leaped onto Richie’s back, Richie catching him and twirling him around, both of them laughing wildly.

“Guys!” Ben, too, was laughing. “Mike’s about to score!”

Richie looked over to Stan. Stan smiled and Richie let out a breath he didn’t realise he was holding.

Mike scored and almost the entire audience, including the losers club, let out a massive cheer and applause.

“YES MIKE!” Stan clapped loudly and Richie waggled his eyebrows at him, taking shelter when Stan marched over to him.

“I will drop kick you to the sun.”

“Only if I’m allowed to bring Eds.”

“Hey! And that is not my name!”

Eddie Kaspbrak, standing with his bike beside the cycling pitch

“Fuck fuck fuck fuck.” Eddie said, bouncing up and down with high knees and occasional arm swing at every word.

“Eddie, if you stretch anymore you’re gonna pull something.” Stan watched as Eddie adjusted his helmet every two seconds.

“How the heck does that work? I thought the entire point why you stretch is so you don’t pull something!” Eddie lunged, barely comprehending the words being said.

“Yeah but you can stretch too much—“

“Too much?! I’ve been jumping around for a good half an hour!” Eddie returned back to his bike and fiddled with the chain.

“Just, forget Stan said anything, you’re gonna be great.” Mike said calmly and Eddie took a shaky breath. This was pretty much the first time he’d actually been in a competition, (apart from the one his mother took him to when he was like eight- some sort of pageant where sons would wear cute little bow ties- how he wished he could forget it) let alone a cycling competition.

He didn’t have high expectations, he’d be happy even if he came second or something, but he still didn’t want to make a complete hash of it and come last. He was just nervous, that’s all. God if his mother saw him now. Preparing for a cycling race of which could result in injuries beyond count. She’d have a bird.

And maybe a few heart attacks.

“I haven’t seen Eds think that deeply since early last year when he was debating whether to push me off the cliff or not.” Richie chuckled, shoving his hands in his pockets to shield the cold. It didn’t seem to be working though, as they were paper white.

“Jesus Rich, you need to buy some gloves.” Eddie took them and enveloped them in his, blowing hot air onto them. If anybody asked, they’d both blame their increasingly pinker cheeks on the cold.

“I wouldn’t need to if you hadn’t stolen all my hoodies.” Richie said, and Eddie looked over to Ben who he’d tossed it to when he was getting ready. “Besides, I’ve given a ton of my hoodies to your mum anyway, says she can barely feel her hands when she—“

“Nope, not hearing that one.” Ben cut him off shortly, and the five said a silent prayer in thanks to Ben.

“W-w-w-when is your race a-a-actually meant t-to start?” Bill asked, kicking a patch of grass repeatedly.

Eddie checked his watch and almost doubled over when he realised he had but two minutes to wheel his bike to the starting line.

“Oh fuck I gotta go.” Eddie grabbed the handle bars and began to leg it.

“You got this Eds!” Richie yelled.

“Not my name!”

“Pedal to the metal!” Mike shouted.

“Pedal to the metal?”

“I read it somewhere.”

“Yeah that magazine in the common room right?” Ben chuckled. How Eddie was still hearing this entire conversation baffled him since they were quite a fair way away from him. Probably their hive mind or something like that.

“Yeah it was like this sports thing or something—“

“Good luck Eddie!” Bev cut them all off and Eddie smiled.

He could do this.

“Contenders, on your bicycles!” Coach announced. Eddie threw his leg over the saddle and sat down, getting the feel of his bike underneath his body. Nothing new, nothing changed, same bike as always.

“Marks!”

“Get set!” Eddie caught sight of Henry Bowers and almost rolled his eyes. He was not going to let that prick ruin this for him. Henry grinned and Eddie drummed his fingers on the handle bars in annoyance.

“Go!” A loud whistle sounded and Eddie and six other contestants sped off through the track, mud kicking up behind their wheels.

Wind rushed around Eddie’s face and body, enhancing his determination and pushing him into third place.

“Not bad.” Eddie whispered to himself as he continued to pedal faster and faster, rounding the second corner and pacing himself for the second lap.

He passed the line and a large megaphone called, “Only two more laps to go!”

Eddie pressed on, coming close to second place. He peddled quicker and quicker and- suddenly he wasn’t pedalling at all. It felt like he was...flying? But in slow motion, like how they say when you’re in a car crash time slows down but you know there is nothing you can do about it. It felt like that.

He looked around quickly and saw the losers’ completely and utterly concerned and shocked faces, and then he could see Henry Bowers’ slightly satisfied, slightly stunned face.

And then he realised he was falling. And fast.

Fuck.

Time instantly started back up again and he came crashing back to earth- quite literally- with a crack. And not a good sounding crack.

He groaned as he rolled onto his back, frowning as he looked for his bike. Perhaps it was his bike’s handle bars that had cracked from the impact of the fall?

Eddie then quickly realised his arm wasn’t feeling to good. In fact it was actually hanging on his stomach in the most peculiar angle he

was sure a normal arm couldn't be in.

Oh Jesus Christ he'd broken his arm.

He vaguely saw figures circling him, blurry and distorted.

But that was the thing. He could still see- just- and he was still breathing, he wasn't dying. Not like his mother said he would. He barely felt pain, only a slight numb feeling in his left arm. But that was it.

All the things his mother had said to him about broken bones or whatever, were lies. He always knew but now he actually knew. Eddie had proved his mother wrong and she wasn't even here to see it. He almost laughed at the thought but it came out more as a smiling choke.

"Guys I think he's hallucinating!"

"Give him space he needs to breathe!"

"What about a paper towel?"

"Blake I'm gonna rip your face off."

"I'll get a teacher, someone stay with him!"

Eddie's sight cleared just enough for him to see Richie kneeling next to him, looking close to tears. Richie.

"Richie." Eddie croaked. He had to let him know he was ok. He was perfect, even. He lifted his arm up, forgetting it was hanging limp, he needed to make sure Richie knew he was ok—

And black.

14. Act Four, Scene One; Just a bit of girl time and a hospital visit

Notes for the Chapter:

sorry this is twenty years late i was hanging with the demons lol

Eddie Kaspbrak, in the hospital

The first time Eddie came around again, it was only for a matter of seconds.

He was in a weird chair thing, and it was moving. Moving, moving with people either side of him. He could just make out that he was going inside somewhere, inside a large white building, when someone near him spoke up;

“If we wheel him to the operation room...”

He was inside now, and everything was so bright and yellow. And his left arm felt almost as if it wasn't there.

He turned his head to see who the person was and leaned heavily on his arm.

Everything went black again.

When he came around a second time, he was in a small room. Someone was saying his name very quietly and for a second he panicked because Oh god, it's his Mother, and she was going to yell and yell and cry at him for breaking his arm, oh god, oh fuck-

But just as his breath started picking up, the light seemingly focused, and he saw a young looking doctor next to him. Her hair was almost exactly the same colour as Mrs Wilson's, and Eddie suddenly wished it was her and he was at Whitemore.

And then he realised he didn't know where he was.

And that's when he remembered Henry Bower's face and his bicycle

and that strange feeling of power and relief as he crashed over his handle bars.

And he remembered the voices, so loud yet so far off. He remembered hearing someone, Stan he thought, and he remembered Richie by his side.

Richie...

"Richie." Eddie croaked, and the Doctor shook her head smartly.

"You've had a bad fall off your bicycle." She said. Her voice was strict but somehow gentle too. "You're in hospital now. Everything will be alright soon, we just need to set your arm."

"Where's-" Eddie said, because he was becoming aware that he was alone in this big scary building with no one he knew.

"Your Mum has been called." The Doctor said.

"No!" Eddie cried, and tried to stand up.

The world wobbled and his head exploded and the Doctor took his shoulders and led him down carefully.

"Don't get too worked up." She said. "Your Mum won't be angry."

Eddie shook his head through the thickness of colour because of course she'll be mad! She'll be terrifying! She'll pull him out of school and lock him in his bedroom and chain him to the walls and-

"We're going to set your arm now, okay?" The Doctor said. She moved to the back of the room and Eddie realised that someone else was there too, a young, good-looking man with blond hair.

"Set?" Eddie asked in a near whisper.

"It just means putting the bones in the right place again." She said. The Man came forward and smiled apologetically at Eddie.

"There might be some pain." He said, putting on white gloves that made a loud snapping sound.

“Okay.” Eddie mumbled. His heart was racing out of his chest and his head was starting to hurt again, but the new knowledge he’d discovered floated back to him; he’s still alive. Despite his Mother’s warnings of pain and the pills and being careful, he’s still alive. He’s breathing, breathing through the lungs that needed asthma medication.

“That’s okay.” Eddie said. Everything was going to be okay. His arm, the lies, his mother. It was okay because the pain won’t kill him.

“Okay.” The man said. He placed his hands on Eddie’s arm and squeezed.

Eddie inhaled sharply and tried to not cry out. The Man said something to the Doctor but Eddie couldn’t quite make out what it was. In fact, he couldn’t see the Doctor anymore.

“Again.” The Man said to Eddie, and moved his hands.

He squeezed again and Eddie bit his tongue, blinking back tears. His head exploded in colours of reds and whites.

More voices, things he could hardly make out, and then some more feeling on his arm.

“Last time, okay?” The man said. In his haze, Eddie had a moment to think that his eyes were the same blue as Richie’s before the man squeezed again.

The black swooped in once again.

When Eddie woke up again, he was no longer in a wheelchair. The room was white, and he woke up looking at the ceiling. A very familiar ceiling, a high arching one with wood crossing over.

But how could he know the room? He’d never been in hospital before, not the one near Whitemore anyway.

Unless he was home, and that’s what it was. His Mum had taken him home and he was now staring up at the ceiling of the hospital he’d spent half his childhood in.

He was trapped again, just as he'd gotten away. All that cycling and he was still stuck. Because he could never run away of his Mother, never fully shake her, never-

Eddie let out a choked noise, half of frustration, half of confusion.

"Ah good, you're up."

And that voice was familiar too. Familiar in a way that didn't sit right with Derry and his Mother.

Eddie tried to sit up but as soon as he moved his left arm, pain shot up. He gasped and let it fall, moving his head to see a white cast.

"Don't go trying to get up by yourself." The voice said, and suddenly Matron was in front of him, her kind face focused as she put Eddie's cushions up.

"But... how..." Eddie mumbled.

"You broke your arm." Matron said. She put her hands carefully under Eddie's arms. "1 2 3, up."

She lifted him into a sitting position and the world only spun for a second.

"You were taken to hospital and they treated your arm and then took you back here." She smiled at him. "Were you out the whole time?"

Eddie shook his head and tried to let everything sink in. The sick bay was empty apart from him and Matron and he ran his fingers over his cast, letting them go over the bumps.

"What about my Mum?" Eddie said suddenly. "She'll worry."

"Mrs Wilson hasn't called her yet." Matron said. "She wanted to talk to you first."

Eddie could of cried out in relief, and almost did, but decided against it. Instead, he asked Matron;

"How are the losers?"

“The what?” Matron asked.

“I mean my friends.” Eddie said hurriedly. “How... how are they?”

“They were awfully cut up.” Matron said. “Begged to go to the hospital with you.”

“What’s the time?” Eddie asked, realising he had no sense of the date at all.

“Just gone half right.” Matron said, glancing at her watch.

“Can i see them?” Eddie asked meekly.

Matron put her hands on her hips and sighed. “I don’t see why not.”

“Yes!” Eddie said, and moved forward. His arm moved and he yelled in surprise, getting a concerned look from matron.

“The pain will be bad for a while.” She said gravely. “But after the first few days it will go.”

Eddie nodded, his arm still ringing, and Matron left the room.

Not five minutes later, he head loud footsteps in the hall, and the losers practically knocked the door down as they ran in.

“Eddie!” Bev cried, making a beeline for his bed.

“How are you?” Stan said, grinning ear from ear.

“I’m okay.” Eddie said as Bill and Mike hugged him. “How are all you?”

“Bored as hell!” Bev said, bouncing on her feet.

“Yeah, nothings as exciting without you.” Ben said.

“We’ve been trying to see you for so fucking long- oops, sorry Matron, but they kept saying you needed rest or some bullshit which is absolutely stupid because you broke your arm you don’t need rest-“

“Richie, if you over excite my patent I am inclined to send you out.”

“Sorry.” Richie grinned, his buckteeth showing. “But seriously, how you feeling Eds?”

“Confused.” Eddie said, and the losers laughed. Then he said, in a much quieter voice: “What happened after I fell off my bike.”

“They didn’t finish the race in the end.” Mike said. “Everyone got off their bikes to check up on you. And then Matron and some other teachers came over and told Mrs Wilson that your arm was broke, and some parents had already called an ambulance.”

“Richie all but tried to climb into it.” Bev said, smiling.

Richie shrugged, “Looked a cool ride.”

Eddie laughed but something still felt off.

“Did you see how it happened?” He asked.

Bev, Richie, Ben and Mike shook their heads but Bill nodded and Stan said “I think so.”

“It w-w-was H-h-h-henry, wasn’t it?” Bill said.

“Henry what?” Bev asked.

“Henry struck his foot under the wheel.” Stan said gravely.

“He did WHAT.” Ben said.

“I was just coming round from the second lap,” Eddie said, eyes squinted. “and I remember seeing Henry’s face in the crowd. And then he kind of... smiled? And the next thing I knew...”

“I don’t care he’s going to get pUSHED OFF A CLIFF-“ Richie said, before Mike put a calming hand on his shoulder.

“We should tell someone.” Mike said. “Mrs Wilson or Mr Johnson.”

“Do we have proof?” Eddie said.

“M-me and S-s-stan.” Bill said.

“Exactly!” Mike said. “She’ll have to expel him or something.”

“I don’t know...” Eddie said uneasily.

“Why not?” Ben said. “He broke your arm for christ’s sake!”

“It just feels like... he’ll do something worse if we do.” Eddie tried to explain lamely. “Look, I’ve known Henry since I can remember, and if you ever tried to one up him-“

“He’d cut your fucking head off.” Bev said.

Eddie looked at her and nodded.

“But Eddie, this is Whitemore! The teachers, they aren’t-“

“They might.” Eddie said. He sighed, feeling too tried all at once. “Look, I won’t do anything for a while but if he gets worse then I will, okay?”

Mike and Stan still looked unconvinced but they agreed all the same. They talked for a while longer, about the play and the parents and how North and East had won lacrosse before Matron shooed them out, with cries from them about visiting soon.

“They could of stayed longer.” Eddie said once the door was shut. “I’m not even that tried!”

“You say that now, but soon you’ll be flat out.” Matron said.

And so he was.

Beverly Marsh, outside the sick bay

“How is he?” Emily asked.

The entirety of east tower- apart from Bev obviously- and the rest of north tower were stood leaning against the wall to the sick bay, deciding for not all of them to go in since it could overwhelm.

“Awake, looks a little pale and drained but awake.” Stan sighed and gestured for all sixteen of them to start walking.

Above everything, Bev just couldn't stop worrying about what Eddie's mother would do. In the countless stories of Eddie's past she's always been the villain, whisking him straight off to hospital to get dosed up on various drugs for a measly paper cut. Some would say it's being overprotective and she's doing it because she loved him, but those people- mostly other parents- can't see through the silver screen smiles.

Worst case scenario, Sonia will roll up to Whitemore somehow (if she can actually fit into her car) and take Eddie straight back to Derry and they'll never see him again. Usually worst case scenarios are unlikely, but this one seemed far too real.

“Bev? Y-y-y-you ok?” Bill wandered next to her.

Her jaw unclenched and tried to relax her shoulders. “Yeah, just thinking.”

“Half the colour just drained from your face, what your thinking about can't be good.” Ben said, linking his hand in Sandie's. Beverly's gaze dropped to her feet.

“Well of course it's not good, Eddie's just broken his arm and his mother is gonna come and lock him up in his bedroom!” Bev non-intentionally raised her voice slightly, feeling a lump form in the back of her throat.

“She fucking tries and she won't see the light of day.” Richie said, his expression filled with storm clouds, threatening to strike.

“Guys calm down, he's here, with us, and in Matron's care. She's gonna have to go through her if she wants to take Eddie.” Mike said calmly and Bev nodded, but didn't feel it calm her anymore than Richie's threat.

They walked aimlessly through corridors back to their common room.

“Hey, wanna go back to our dorm?” Audra asked gently.

Bev loosened up a bit and drew in a deep breath. “Sure.”

“Girls, let’s go back to east!” Audra said a little louder and the seven (apart from Sandie who seemed to just stand there) shrugged and nodded.

“Back to east? What about the play?” Eric frowned.

“What about it? We have a good few months still, chill out.” Buffy said.

“What are you planning to do in there anyway?” Ben almost pouted, still clinging onto Sandie’s hand.

“Oh you know, girl stuff.” Chloe grinned and shrugged.

Richie snorted. “Yeah, turns out they’re all lesbians and just have one massive session—“

“Beep beep you dirty fuck.” Greta said and Richie’s expression instantly turned serious again and he turned away. Bev knew it was one thing getting beeped by one of the losers, which he still wasn’t too fond of but didn’t despise it, but when anybody else he wasn’t close with did it? For Richie it could’ve been a slap to the face.

Audra cleared her throat. “Right, shall we go then?” They all made their way out of the common room when Bev turned around and saw Sandie still in Ben’s grasp.

“Sandie? You not coming?” She frowned and Sandie sheepishly shook her head.

“Sorry, it’s just I still need to take advertisement photos with Ben.” She said.

Bev raised her eyebrows and nodded. “Ok.” And with that she walked off to catch up with the rest of them.

“So, Audra, what exactly were you planning?” Alison asked as they climbed the stairs up to their room.

“Well, since I think we’ve all had enough of boys at this point—“

“Hell yeah.” Bev said, and suddenly she wanted a cigarette so bad.

“—I thought we should just have a little time away from north tower and just have fun away from the stress of things.” Audra opened up the door and they all filtered in.

“What are you gonna make us do, paint our nails and braid each other’s hair while listening to Madonna?” Buffy guessed. Bev was slightly taken back at how she just came up with all that, given that she seemed nothing like the type. But hey, don’t judge a book by its cover right?

At any rate, Greta couldn’t have looked more excited. Audra beamed. “All that, but while wearing face masks!”

Emily squealed and that set them all off; Patty handed out like five tubs of strawberry and aloe vera face masks which Bev couldn’t wait to get stuck in her hair, Greta brought over a massive back pack which was stacked to the brim with all types of hair products Bev had never seen in her life.

“Ohh so that’s why I see you with a different hair brush every month.” Chloe dipped her hand into the bag and brought out four different kinds.

“Duh, how else do you think I keep this hair luscious?” Greta flipped her hair and they all chuckled. “Here Beaverly,” Greta handed her a elasticated ring of fabric. “You’re gonna need that.”

“Oh, and why’s that?” Bev raised her eyebrows.

“Guys.” Audra groaned.

“You really don’t know shit do you?” Greta rolled her eyes. Bev was ready to sling shot the thing right back at her. “It’s so you don’t get the face mask in your hair, dummy.” Greta looked as if she were biting her tongue to stop her from saying anything else. Good move on her part in Bev’s opinion. “Like this,” Greta tugged the thing over her head, swept her hair over it and pulled it over her face and onto her head again.

“Like this?” Bev did the same, her fringe moving up with it. It felt

like she'd got botox or something.

"Well—"

"Yes, it's fine! Ok right, anyone have any records in their drawers?" Audra asked.

A good twenty minutes later they'd all successfully gotten face masks on, nails painted, empty ginger beer bottles around the room since Chloe kept a secret stash if ever they had a midnight feast and on the second side of Madonna's album.

"Ok guys guys, I have an idea." Alison took a last swig of her drink and sat up straight. "Since we're like bonding and shit, how about a game of truth or dare?"

Bev internally groaned. The last time they'd played a game of truth or dare, Bev ended up getting her underwear in a twist for Bill. And that did not end well.

"Ugh that's so boringggg." Bev slumped back on her bed.

"Yeah, we do that literally all the time." Buffy picked at a bit of face mask that was hanging off her chin.

Greta stood up, midway through Dutch plaiting Emily's hair. "How about we scratch the truths and just do dares then?"

"Now you're talking." Bev grinned.

They got in a circle in the middle of the dorm.

"Eugh Patty when can we get these masks off? I can barely move my face in these things." Buffy patted her face grudgingly.

"It says wait half an hour on the tub so I'd give it a few more minutes." Patty shrugged.

"A few more minutes and it'll turn into cement." Chloe laughed.

"Ok right, the plan in action, who's going first?" Alison asked. Nobody volunteered.

"I'll go." Bev rolled her eyes at the group and laughed. "Sissies."

"Ok so the two people on each of Bev's side has to come up with a dare and Bev will choose which ever one she likes best, got it?" Audra clarified. They all nodded.

"Hmmm." Buffy sized up Bev and narrowed her eyes. The fact that nobody has asked about rules yet just sums up their entire chaotic energy. And Beverly was living for it.

"Ooh! I got one." Chloe stood up.

"Why are you standing?"

"I don't know the power just suddenly overwhelmed me." Chloe said. "Anyway, Bev, I dare you to knock on Matron's door and run away before she opens it."

"Pfft. That was my past time when I was growing up." Bev began to stand but Buffy pulled her down again.

"You haven't heard mine yet. I dare you to call up the local grocery shop and flirt with who ever picks up." Buffy said and low hum of 'Ooh' floated around the room. Bev weighed her choices and made her decision.

"Life's too short for ding dong ditching am I right?" Bev said and exited the dorm, them all following suit, down the hallway to the emergency phone on the wall. She rung the number they'd seen so many times in the canteen hall and waited as it rung.

"What are you gonna say?"

"No fucking clue." Bev replied. As soon as she spoke, a guy picked up the phone and they all hushed, desperately trying not too burst into hysterics.

"Hello this is Local Grocer speaking, how can I help you today?"

"Oh hello there," Beverly spoke sickly sweet. "Um, just wondering if you had any specific vegetables up at your joint?" Patty clamped a hand over her face.

“Um, sure yeah uh what type were you looking for?”

“Oh you know, anything long and big.” Bev twirled the phone cord as she spoke and almost laughed herself.

The guy coughed and she heard some shuffling about before he returned to the phone. “So, what we currently have in stock is carrots, cucumbers, eggplant—“

“Eggplant?” Bev repeated and the seven of them almost doubled over, Patty having to walk to the nearest window to calm herself down.

“That’s.. what I said?”

“Well, be sure to have a nice big one for when I next come round, thank you dear, goodbye!” Bev slammed the phone back on the receiver and outwardly cringed while they all gasped for breath from laughter.

“Bev I said flirt not ask for it.” Buffy said between breathes, holding Emily up as tears streamed down her face.

“Oh God I hope that guy doesn’t personally deliver our canteen food.” Audra sighed, wiping her eyes as they all wandered back into the dorm.

Probably an hour or two later (Bev had completely lost track of time), the games had finished and they were all chatting aimlessly about anything and everything. To some, this would be the most boring thing in the world, but to Bev, she couldn’t have been more content.

Just being away from everything, not that she liked being away from the losers of course, sometimes is the cure. Being in a little bubble won’t get you through life at all but every so often you need that time with friends to distract you from everything. ‘Girly time’ or whatever you want to call it, to Bev, is like the pinch of salt you need in certain meals.

And Bev didn’t realise how much she needed it until now.

Mike Hanlon, in the drama hall

“Yeah then step to your left— yep left, Blake, LEFT FOR THE LOVE OF GOD.” Stan yelled as Blake continued to spin right for the third time.

“Stan, calm down.” Mike patted his shoulder gently.

“This would be a whole lot fucking easier if East decided to show up.” Stan grumbled, fanning himself with the scripts.

“How come they get to have girly time and we don’t get to have boy time?” Eric folded his arms and pouted. The whole of North stared at him. “What? Why not?”

“Because, young Eric, if we announce it like the girls do, people like Henry Bowers will waltz up to us, call us fairies or whatever term they like to use, and knock us the fuck out.” Richie said from across the stage, bummed out sitting on a random chair Mike didn’t remember being put up there.

Since east tower decided they would have some ‘girly’ time away from everything, the rest of them were stuck trying to sort out very unfinished dances with only half the cast. Mike didn’t really know why they were even trying but he guessed it would be a good distraction from Eddie being quarantined in the sick bay.

“W-w-wuh-Wait what’s the p-p-part after we a-a-all turn in grease l-lightning?” Bill frowned, still trying to memorise what Stan had briefly said before losing it over Blake.

“Not now Bill,” Stan groaned. “Look at this, everything is turning to shit! Richie is a loose fucking end without Eddie being around, Bill is actually trying to learn something- when have we ever seen that?” Bill began to protest but Stan just hushed him. “And east is no longer bothering anymore!”

Mike blinked. “Well when you put it like that—“

“Aliya!” Ben greeted loudly, stopping them all from going on about

how shit that day was going. “Um, what are you doing here?”

“Thought I’d see how you’re all getting on with this play of yours.” The head student smiled warmly, grabbed a near by chair and sat down on it.

“D— uh,” Stan stuttered. “Did you um, want to see it?”

“Well I mean I was hoping so.” Aliya shrugged, looking quite expectant of them to just break out into song.

“We c-c-c-c-ca-ca—“

“Can. We can, is what Bill was trying to say.” Stan shot a look at Bill and Mike could practically feel how much Bill was restraining himself from rolling his eyes.

“Give us a second,” Ben said and began to walk to back stage.

“Something wrong?” Aliya asked, and Mike could’ve cringed at the tense energy in the room.

“Nope, just uh, just finding the right track!” Ben called, and Mike quickly followed after him. “And buying us some time, where are they?” Ben flicked slowly through the records.

“Put on grease lightening, that way only we have to dance and stuff anyway.” Mike said. Ben nodded and pulled out the track. God forbid east had to be away and Eddie breaking his arm the one time the head girl came to watch them put on a performance.

“Is the turn table broken?” Aliya’s voice became louder as she made her way to backstage. As soon as she said, the record began its cycle and Ben and Mike rushed out to get in positions. “Are the girls in this one?”

“Th— um they uh well—“

“No, this is just the Thunder Birds.” Mike said calmly, willing east to stroll through that damn door that minute.

They broke off into dance, Bill singing loudly and them all

cooperating as they'd rehearsed. It wasn't the best, probably would've looked a lot better if it actually had the lighting cues but what can you do when half the cast are off somewhere having fun.

"The show must go on." Mike quietly mumbled to himself as Bill held the last riff and they all flopped down to the floor. The track ended and Aliya applauded heartily

"You didn't hear it from me but west and south have some tough competition!" Aliya smiled.

"We know." Blake rolled his eyes playfully and she laughed.

"Yeah," she sighed. "Well thank you guys, I mean it would've been nice to see you and the girls together but I guess—"

The door swung open and a bunch of giggling girls strolled in shouting about something Mike couldn't work out. He looked over at Stan and saw him drumming his fingers agitatedly on his leg.

They saw Aliya and immediately stopped laughing and straightened up a bit.

"Ah there you are, girls!" Aliya clapped happily. "I was just mentioning you."

"You were." Bev looked over to the slightly sweating boys and ever so slightly cringed.

"Yeah, come on I wanna see a full cast performance!" She grinned. "Where were you all?"

"Where were we? Um we were, ha um funny story actually. Patty, care to explain where we were?" Greta cleared her throat, twiddling her hair round in a million curls. Mike could almost hear Blake's eyes rolling.

"...wwwwe were checking up on Eddie of course!" Patty said and Aliya nodded her head.

"Well then, now that you're all here, let the performance begin." She said and east tower immediately ran up on stage and apologised

continuously.

“S fine now shut up.” Stan murmured as Ben put on another track.

“Rich? You ok?” Bev hissed. Mike saw Richie picking at his fingernail in boredom, being un-Richie-like-for-Richie quiet. “Awfully quiet.”

“Shh, it’s starting!” Ben hurried back over and they all took their places for the finale, We Go Together.

About half way through, things were going well. They were landing in all the right places as if east never left, Bill and Audra’s singing was pitched to a T, what could possibly throw them off guard?

Mike had previously thought nothing but when the bitch head called Henry Bowers strolled through the door like a king, it was like a ripple of tension flooding the stage. Every move turned a notch more rigid and Richie’s dance moves became so limp and lifeless it was like his soul had left his body to go show Henry Bowers and snippet of his mind. And Mike knew how he felt.

As soon as the dance came to an end, Dipshi— Henry clapped loudly, as if every clap was another cup of satisfaction being poured over his head. Mike wished it would drown him.

Aliya’s head whipped around and he waved at her, winking with a plastic smile.

“Well well, aren’t you just doing amazing.” Henry locked eyes with Mike and made some sort of gesture with his hands. Mike bit his cheeks and mentally noted to push him from the roof top some day. “Even with one member down.”

Bill leaned gently into Richie, Mike guessed as a mild warning for him to not go and punch the shit out of him in front of the head girl.

“What are you doing here Henry?” Aliya asked, her voice completely different to how she’d spoken to north and east a few moments ago. It had a slight edge.

“Does there need to be a reason?” Henry lounged about the drama hall, trailing his finger across the wall.

“When you’re supposed to be in your room revising, yes, there does.” Aliya pointed out.

“Ah, revising can wait.”

They all shared slightly confused looks, not knowing how to react with this interaction. Bev still looked like her red hair was about catch fire and she’d burst into flames.

“Guess I now know why you’re pole for being head boy failed.” She mumbled to herself, enough for him to hear.

“What did you say?” He said, though Mike could sense a mild tone of difference as he spoke to her.

“Nothing Henry, just leave.” Aliya spoke more firmly and Henry looked away as if to decide what to do next.

“What part of leave do you not get Henry?” Stan spoke up.

“Huh, they do speak.” His grin returned.

“Got a lot more from where that came from.” Bev’s eyes flashed at him and Ben silently put his hand on her shoulder. She looked tempted to shrug it off but she turned to see who it was and just sighed.

“Henry if you don’t go I literally have all rights to send you to Mrs Wilson.” Aliya’s tone grew sharper and Henry slightly flinched. Mike frowned.

Henry looked tempted to glare at Aliya but just grunted and walked to the door, seemingly unimpressed. He turned around a final time and looked at the losers. “Huh, I notice there’s only six of you losers. Hope the other one is holding up alright after that nasty, nasty fall.” Henry flickered a grin so subtle Aliya couldn’t see, “i’ll be off!” He said and with that he fled from the room.

“Fucking GOOD you piece of raw SHIT.” Richie slid off the stage to walk to the door but Mike grabbed him. Richie turned him and Mike was almost taken back with the rim of tears that lined his eyes. He hugged him gently.

“Are you all alright?” Aliya frowned and they all nodded.

“He’s always on our backs for some reason.” Stan shrugged.

Mike let go of Richie and Richie almost laughed for the first time that day.

“Jesus now I think I need some girly time.”

Ben Hansom, in the common room

Sandie could somehow look effortless beautiful doing even the most simplest of tasks.

Like right now, she was searching for their play folder in the common room. Her eyes were pools of deep concentration, her fingers whispering on the book spines, yet Ben thought all of this could be the movements from angels themselves.

“Found it!” She said suddenly, and slipped out the familiar folder, holding it under her arm. Her camera was around her head, black and white, and her hair was tied up in a bun which made her face shape look so lovely Ben thought he’d faint.

He was dating Sandie. Him. Ben Hansom was dating Sandie Millman.

“Let’s go.” Ben said, sounding breathless despite having stood still.

Sandie grinned and took his hand, the two of them walking out of the busy commons room. They’d just finished their first dress rehearsal, and Aliya had informed them afterwards that Mrs Wilson wanted some type of advising poster. Sandie had put herself and Ben forward to take some photos and the rest of East and North had agreed, so the two of them had grabbed their cameras quickly and were ready to head down to the drama hall, where they’d been rehearsing.

Ben wouldn’t of minded doing the task -he enjoyed photography, but mostly of different scapes he saw outside. But with Sandie, he could already feel his heart start to beat with sugarcoated beats, making his stomach feel swoopy, like he was on a rollercoaster. It was something he never thought would go away while he was dating Sandie. That bubbly feeling, as if you were almost gliding everywhere.

He hoped it never went away.

“Any ideas, Babe?” Sandie said casually as they headed down the stairs.

“Babe?” Ben said, his face growing hot.

“Yeah.” Sandie laughed. “That seems to be half the dialogue in Grease. That and my own name which, may I add, is very confusing.”

Ben chuckled and squeezed her soft hand, wondering faintly if he should also hold the stair handle incase one of them trips and they both end up with Eddie in the sick bay.

He decided he preferred the feel of Sandie’s hand over the cold wood, and continued to hold it.

“Which would you prefer?” He asked, trying for a casual tone but instead sounding like a sixty year old business man.

“Sandie or Babe?” Sandie said.

“Yeah.” Ben said, his face so a furnace.

Sandie laughed sweetly, her eyes squinting slightly. She shook her head to move loose honey hairs and said; “Sandie, I think. Babe sounds too...”

“Too formal?” Ben guessed.

“I was going to say too sex driven.”

“Ah.” Ben said as they reached the studio, trying his best not to turn into the Sahara desert right there and then.

Sandie opened the door (Ben thought his mer touch might set the wood aflame) and they both walked in, heading straight to the stage.

“What were you thinking?” Ben asked, pulling Sandie up.

“Something simple.” Sandie said. “Like a blank background and then just the word ‘Grease’ under a prop or something.”

"I like it." Ben nodded, the two of them slipping behind the curtain.
"Get the message across."

"Indeed." Sandie said from behind Ben, and giggled. Ben turned around and saw Emily's pink wig swung messily over her head.

"Subtle." Ben said.

Sandie put it back carefully, and pulled out a pink lady jacket, "How about this?"

"And instead of the title underneath it, it would say something like 'She's too pure to be pink'." Ben suggested.

"Yes!" Sandie said, clicking her fingers. "Ben that's genius!"

They ended up picking a Pink Lady's jacket, Danny's glasses and a plastic tire.

Sandie draped a white cloth over part of the floor and her and Ben spent a good five minutes trying to straighten it out, laughing the entire time. Finally, the three photos were taken.

"I think these will look great." Sandie said enthusiastically.

"They will." Ben said. "You have a great eye."

Sandie smiled up at him for a moment, before a sad expression passed over her face.

"What's up?" Ben said tenderly.

"Oh, uh..." Sandie floundered. "It's only, I don't want our relationship to be you worshipping me and seeing me as this some kind of God, Ben. You're amazing too."

"Oh, I know." Ben said quickly.

"Just, don't forget that." Sandie said, smiling sweetly. "I like you a whole lot."

"I like you a whole lot too, Babe." Ben said.

Sandie laughed and the two left the hall together, Ben floating the entire way.

Stan Uris, back stage

Stan and Mike ducked under the red curtains, the soft material brushing their hair as they enter the backstage area from the stage.

There was a deep smell of sawdust and drying paint, and Stan made a mental note to figure out if the studio had any air con at all.

“We have our work cut out.” Mike said, standing close so Stan so their shoulders brushed.

“Sure do.” Stan said. They’d both chosen to clear up every from their dress rehearsal that afternoon (Stan, quite honestly, had nothing better to do) and they’d both underestimated the amount of debris left behind by their two towers, scatters of props trailing the floor and odd piles of pastel colours costumes.

“Well, let’s not dally.” Mike said, moving further into the chaos.

“Dally?” Stan asked. He asserted the forest of mess as one would assert a math equation and splits everything into pares. Then, he heads for the nearest pile of clothes.

“Think Ben and Sandie took good photos?” Mike asked. Him and Stan had seen them both leave the hall moments before, hands clasped together, skin tinted pink like they were a beautiful couple from an oil painting.

“I trust Ben has.” Stan said, picking up a discarded pink ladies jacket and putting it on a hanger. “And Sandie probably has, too.”

“Hope so.” Mike said. “She seems like she has a good eye.”

“Mmm.” Stan said. In all truth and honesty, he really didn’t feel like he knew Sandie all too well. She joined in with whatever Tower activities they had but it almost felt as though she was half transparent. As if she wasn’t there or didn’t feel there. Maybe because she joined late or maybe because, even without realising it, East and

North were somehow isolating her.

Whatever made her feel less there, Stan chose to ignore it. Ben seemed to have found a key to her and he felt assured that within time, they all would.

“This is duller than dull.” Mike said, breaking the silence hanging like early morning mist.

“You volunteered.” Stan said, finishing the first rack of clothes.

“We all make mistakes in life.” Mike said gravely, making Stan chuckle.

“The more you talk-“

“The longer it will take, I know.” Mike said. He picked one of their cardboard cars and strapped it on. “Maybe I should drive out of here.”

“That was the worst pun you’ve made.” Stan said, walking over to inspect it.

“This is probably the worst prop we’ve made.” Mike said. “Look at this! It’s meant to be a car, Stan! It looks like a deformed playhouse.”

“Positive.” Stan said.

“Honest.” Mike said, taking the cardboard off so some of his shirt pulled up.

“It’ll work out.” Stan said.

“Yeah?” Mike said.

“Trust me Mikey.” Stan said. “Everything will work out fine.”

“I trust you.” Mike said, placing the car back only slightly more neatly than how he had found it. “Meanwhile, we have all of this to sort out.”

“It’s not so bad.” Stan said. “And at least now we’ve done it once we

won't need to do it again.”

“Very true.” Mike said. “However...”

He walked over to their stereo and pressed the button. It made a neat clicking sound that sounded louder under the hall's dome ceiling and static spilled from the stereo.

“My favourite song.” Stan said over the muffled cracking sound.

“Be that way.” Mike said, going through the radio stations. Snippets of songs flew out before being cut off by another one, Mike seeming transfixed on the stereo.

He found a song he was satisfied with and let it play, stepping back and wiping his hands as if they had dust on them.

‘Can you hear my heart beat?
Can you hear my heart beat?
I can hear your heart beat,
I can change your heart beat.’

“Outstanding choice.” Stan said, and Mike half shrugged.

The next twenty minutes pasted by quickly, music drifting out of the stereo and the sun, now setting much earlier each day, sending golden light through the window.

It was moments like this, moments of pure beauty and endlessness, that Stan always experienced with Mike. Like he possessed a certain ethereal nature that no one else had.

“I think we're done here.” Mike said after ‘Wonderwall’ finished.

Stan looked at the now tidy room, with their things put into the places they were suppose to be and smiled. “Looks good enough to me.”

“Then it's good enough for all.” Mike said, and laughed.

They headed out backstage, and Stan's foot hit something. He almost buckled, but Mike caught him and Stan wobbled back.

“Shit.” Stan said. A bucket of white paint was on the floor, a tape measure besides it.

“Do we have to put that away too?” Mike almost wailed.

Stan shook his head, thinking logically, “We’re painting the set very soon, Mrs Wilson probably provided it.”

“Ah.” Mike said, nodding. Then he looked down at his hands, still holding Stan, and let them drop, grinning sheepishly.

Stan tried to ignore the loop his heart was doing and the two of them left, the starting notes to ‘More than a feeling’ echoing in the background.

Notes for the Chapter:

haha oops

Author's Note:

it only gets crazier from here kids